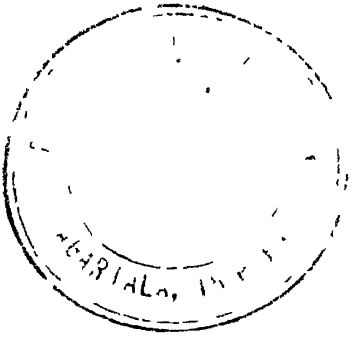
SATINATH BHADURI

THE VIGIL

Translated from the Bengali

by

LILA RAY



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This English Translation

The Original Bengali Work *Jagari*

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To the memory

of

the devoted labour and sacrifice

of obscure and humble patriots

whose

achievements will not be recorded

in

the annals of our nation's history

INTRODUCTION

Sri Satinath Bhaduri's father was a well-known Bengali lawyer who settled in Purnea, a small town in the north of Bihar, in order to practise his profession. His son was born there, in October 1906, and was brought up to follow in his father's footsteps. Satinath studied law and economics at Patna University. History was also a favourite subject. Politics attracted him while he was still a student and a lawyer's career was not to his liking. After passing his examinations he plunged into the struggle for India's independence. He travelled extensively in the countryside in connection with this work and served three terms in prison. Without this experience, he says, it would not have been possible for him to write *The Vigil.*

After India became free Sri Satinath Bhaduri retired from politics. He lives quitely at home, absorbed in his books and his garden. His favourite subjects are Philosophy and Sanskrit. He is an authority on plants. He enjoys the companionship of old friends and likes pets, especially dogs. Meetings and public engagements of all kinds he seeks to avoid. He has made one trip abroad, visiting Europe in 1950. He has written eleven books, novels and short stories, to date.

The Vigil was Sri Bhaduri's first novel and it was also the first book to be awarded the Rabindra Memorial Prize by the West Bengal Government. It is in its tenth edition. The immediate acclaim it won established Sri Bhaduri's position in the literary world of Bengal, a position which has been consolidated by his subsequent work.

The Vigil is the first novel in Bengali to be written against the political and social background of the 1942 Movement. It was written in 1944, the year Gandhi was released from Prison and published in 1946, a few months before India was formally declared a free and independent nation. The change in the political pattern had been perceptible for some time. It is safe to say that a novel of this kind could not have been either written or published earlier. It was hailed by distinguished

critics as the first fruit of the changed atmosphere and followed by a series of outspoken books on hitherto dangerous political themes.

Sri Satinath Bhaduri says, however, that his purpose in *The Vigil* was to depict a family tragedy more than to describe jail life or the political scene. When political awakening comes to a country or a people, conflicts are bound to arise between different schools of opinion. In some cases the repercussions affect the lives of families. The family Sri Satinath Bhaduri has chosen for this novel is a Bengali family living in north Bihar. The father is the Headmaster of a Boys' School who resigns in order to become a follower of Gandhi. He founds an ashram in which his two sons, Nilu and Bilu, grow up. Both boys, and their parents as well, become involved in the August Revolution of 1942. Nilu, blinded by political passion, gives evidence against Bilu. Bilu is condemned to death for sabotage. In May 1943, the time of the novel, British intransigence was at its height and there appeared to be little hope of a settlement ever being reached. In June Lord Wavell became Viceroy and a new phase in Indo-British relations began.

The Vigil is divided into four sections, one for each of the four main characters. Prison walls divide them and they are confined within their own hearts, locked up in their own thoughts. Talking to themselves in a silent monologue which is free from the inhibitions external communication or vocal exchange would impose, they tell us about themselves, about the lives they have led and about the country. Jail life intrudes but does not disturb. Bilu's ruminations cover thirty-three years, 1909-1943. The novelty of this form makes *The Vigil,* in the opinion of many, the most vivid of the novels written around 1942.

Some knowledge of historical developments in modern India is essential to an understanding of this book. To assist the reader a Chronological List of Events leading up to May 1943, covering the immediately preceding period, is provided. A glossary which will, it is hoped, serve the purpose of notes is also given. The non-Indian reader must feel his way patiently into the Indian way of life. There is much that may escape his attention unless pointed out. One such thing is,

for instance, that the Mother never refers to the Father by name, nor does he to her. To each other they are 'he' and 'she' or 'Bilu's Mother' and 'Bilu's Father'. Names are taboo between husband and wife. Neither do young people address elders by name. The name of the Father is never disclosed. He remains the anonymous Master Saheb, i.e. Schoolmaster, to the end. She is the anonymous Mother.

Santiniketan, West Bengal, India — LILA RAY
11 November, 1962

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TIME AND PLACE

MAY 1943 PURNEA CENTRAL JAIL, BIHAR, INDIA

DURATION OF ACTION

ONE NIGHT

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Bilu	eldest brother; called Dada by younger brother
Nilu	youngest brother
Mastar Saheb	father. Former Headmaster of a Boys' School. Bengali domiciled in Bihar. Follower of Gandhi
Mother	Bengali middleclass lady of moderate education
Saraswati	Bihari girl loved by Bilu. Sister of Sahadeo and Kapiladeo
Sahadeo	Bihari Congress worker
Kapiladeo	Bihari landowner. Elder brother of Sahadeo and Saraswati
Jathama	Friend of family

Political workers, prisoners, warders, jail officials, village people

THE CONDEMNED CELL

(BILL)

The pale light of twilight is glimmering on the topmost branch of the peepul tree in Ward No. 2. Birds are fluttering from branch to branch in large numbers, without a moment's pause. Within a short while everything will be covered with darkness. Silence will take its turn throughout the night. Perhaps that is the reason for so much restlessness among the birds, so much shaking of wings, so much joy, as much joy as can be wrested from time at the last moment. Is this really the reason why birds are so excited and lively in the evening? Before I came to this cell, when I was in Ward No. 2, we all used to go out into the open air just before the lock-up. We used to drink in the air. Was it really necessary? No. We were accustomed to sitting in the room. There was no need to go out. Yet we all felt we had to get out, at least once! I noticed that most of the political prisoners went. The warders resented it and muttered among themselves. They seemed to think the prisoners did it deliberately to provoke them. But nobody did it only to harass the warders. Why shouldn't we enjoy ourselves the little that was possible?

The birds must be crows. From this distance it's impossible to see. Birds flutter their wings even during the night.

We spent the night underneath the big banyan at Kamakhya the time we came home that way from the meeting at Bokrikole. It is said that leprosy is cured by lying on the ground there. People travel long distances for the cure. Lepers were lying about under the tree in large numbers. Nilu was with me. Perhaps Sahadeo was too. What a noise the birds in the tree made with their wings the whole night long! The three of us lay side by side underneath. Nilu was annoyed at my having selected this spot to rest in. "Can you tell me why the birds are beating their wings so?" I asked him. "Ants are biting them probably," he answered. It takes no time for him to think. He has a settled opinion about everything. And he does not change his opinion readily. Nilu has always been like that.

The red glow of the evening is paling. The top branch of

the peepul is red with the last light in the sky. The tree's leaves do not look green any more. Let the green go—the green of the leaves ! It was the only bit of green that is visible from here. The green and a strip of blue sky between the bars is like a slice of bread on the wires of a toaster. To a man in a cell it is as real as bread and more satisfying that the food of a C Class prisoner. The upper storey of the prison's watch-tower can also be seen from here. Written in large white letters on it are the words, Purnea Central Jail, Bihar. That strip of sky is mine in a very special sense ; it belongs to me. As long as it is visible I gaze deeply into its clear blue. Has anyone ever, in the way I have, possessed that particular part of the sky? It's changing colour now from minute to minute, this sky of mine. The blue has turned to rose, the rose to violet. Now the violet is going grey. It is about to plunge into solid darkness. I cannot make out why the jailor should permit a prisoner who has lost everything to possess such a rich source of pleasure. Perhaps they do not know. If they were to hear about it the convicts who work as masons would be ordered to build the wall in front of my cell higher immediately, to-morrow ! "Higher ! Higher ! Quick ! Wall out the sky !" the command would be imperative. All that can be seen from here, with the exception of that strip of sky and the green of the peepul, is iron, cement, brick, cement, iron. These do not draw the eye They only wound it, throwing it back upon itself. The colours of everything except the blue and green are harsh and repellent. They hurt. The white walls of the cell are so lifeless, so blanched ! Who knows when they were whitewashed last? They are stained, mostly with spittle. The marks are brownish. Perhaps a soldier gave one of my predecessors some tobacco. He departed for an un-known destination long ago, leaving the sign of his gratitude to the soldier on the wall.

There's no one to talk to. My only connection with the world outside my cell is through the ear. The only person to whom I can speak is the warder. It's no pleasure to talk with the warder. Walls are all around me. The gaze of my eyes is repulsed no matter in which direction I look now but my ears are alert, always eager for any sound outside. The cell is sixteen feet long, ten feet wide There is a heavily barred door in the

front. In the South wall there is a small window, high up, close to the ceiling. Beneath it, set into the floor and fastened to the wall are two heavy iron plates a yard wide and a yard and a half long. The plates have holes in them. I don't know what they are there for—perhaps to let the air in! Or perhaps they have been installed so that a warder can hear what the prisoner says from outside. The warder on duty at the barred door can see plainly everything that the prisoner does. I don't know the reason for this additional arrangement. The only furniture in the cell consists of two earthen bowls blackened with tar which are set in a corner. A circular whitewashed patch on the floor marks the place off. On the other side of the wall with the small window, the South wall, a road passes through the prison. It's a wide road, macadamised. The road runs round all the wards. The prison hospital is across it. A lot of people pass along the road—warders, prisoners, the doctor and the apothecary, officials, contractors, masons. During the daytime it's as crowded as a street in a country town. And is this huge place, the Purnea Central Jail, not like a town? Ordinarily some twenty-five hundred prisoners live here. Now, in the month of May, 1943, there are four and a half thousand. It's surprising there are not more. The people of our country will starve by the road side rather than do anything that will put them in prison. What's the necessity of starving to death when they can find six months' food and shelter by merely shouting, 'Inquilab Zindabad!' or snatching a handful of edibles from a shop? Four and a half thousand. When the population of a town reaches five thousand it's declared a municipality. This prison is a small town. A good name for it would be Lohargarod, the Iron-barred. That sounds something like Leningrad. I sit with my ear to the iron plates.

The sound of the human voice is so good! One can learn all about the internal and external politics of the jail sitting here. The Superintendent and the Jailor are not getting on well together. Does the Jailor address the Head Warder with the politeness due to his rank? I learn about Japanese methods of warfare, how many prisoners are to be released because there is no place to keep them, that the jail staff which has been brought in from Burma is trying to get the better of the Bihari Jail staff. All this and much more comes to my ears.

From my place here I was able to count the number of times the stretcher went to and fro from the hospital after the political prisoners were beaten up the other day. When I hear the clanking of iron I know some prisoner is passing who has been punished for a breach of jail discipline with the 'bar and fetters'. Perhaps he disobeyed the orders of a jail official.

What mosquitoes! Once the sun goes down there is no defence against them. The Superintendent came to ask if I needed anything. He would give me anything that is permissible he said. When I was a little boy I was told that such a question is put to condemned prisoners and that most of them ask for a good meal. Did the new Superintendent expect that kind of request from me? I felt tempted to ask for a mosquito net, that I might sleep in a little comfort, but when it came to the point I couldn't bring myself to utter the words. It hurt my self-respect. "Thank you," I said instead, "I'm very comfortable. I don't require anything." Later the warder informed me, "Two nationalists from Karada State in Orissa were hung in this prison. One was in this cell, Cell No. 1 and the other in Cell No. 2. They'd shot an Englishman. Killed him outright, five years ago. On the day before they were hung they fried and ate a lot of chicken eggs. All that night they shouted 'Inquilab Zindabad' and other slogans. They kept it up to the last. Not a single prisoner could sleep. You could have asked for anything you feel like eating. Why didn't you?"

The warder's advice was not to my liking but I did not disbelieve him. These warders are uneducated. They steal at every opportunity and bully the prisoners. They treat weak prisoners inhumanly. But they respect prisoners who have dignity and some gravity of demeanour. They are people of blunt speech. They do not understand an insinuation or take a hint. They have no pretensions to manners. The Superintendent and other officials have the decency not to mention hanging or anything connected with it in my presence. But every warder begins to talk about it as soon as I exchange a few words with him. At first it made me shudder. I felt weak and grew absent-minded. A vision of the gallows and all its appurtenances rose before me. And I had to reassure myself with the hope that my execution might yet be stayed. But it was not long before I grew used to it. Now it doesn't disturb

me at all. The gallows is just to the West of this cell. The warders brought me the news that it has been given a fresh coat of paint, black paint. They told me a sandbag weighing as much as I do, was tied to the rope and the strength of the noose tested. And other things of the same kind.

The way my thoughts move is strange. When they told me about the fresh coat of paint I found myself wondering whether it was tar or black Japanese lacquer. "Is it tar?" I asked the warder. "What is the rope made of? Common cordage?" I mock myself What is it to me what the rope is made of? Does it matter? Even now? I have always noticed the odd way in which my thoughts move. Unimportant things have a greater attraction for me than the important ones. When all the other boys in school were busy preparing answers to likely questions before an examination I found myself more interested in the less important though associated aspects of the subjects, quite trivial things, in spite of the fact that I had no answers ready. Minor theorems in geometry interested me more than the major ones. Often I read the footnotes and the introduction of a text book the day before an exam. At the beginning of the year it seemed to me that, as the important things had to be read anyway I might as well enjoy the less important first. In the end I never got to the important ones.

I remember a night when I was studying in the Vidyapith at Benares. Sakal Deo and I were up late studying. About midnight he began reading the editorial of Aj aloud to me, after taking a pinch of snuft. When the police arrested me there later, on the suspicion of being involved in a political crime, I used to think about the gallows often. They let me go for want of evidence. I had not, actually, been involved. But I was terrified of the gallows just the same. Perhaps I'm not afraid any more because I have really been sentenced to them. Fear is always greater from a distance. People who have never been to jail think it a terrible thing to be sent there but once you are in you're no longer afraid.

Uh! These mosquitoes are really troublesome! The mosquitoes in our Gandhi Ashram are bigger and make more noise but their bites hurt less. When Nilu was there he used to tease Mother. "They're ashram mosquitoes," he'd say, "They've learnt to suck blood non violently." Mother would hide a smile and

pretend to scold. "Enough! Now come here, will you?" I can still see her face plainly. There are wrinkles in the corners of her eyes. She seems to be always apprehensive lest Nilu say something disrespectful about Father. And she takes care to see that it does not reach Father's ears when he does. Nilu is always blunt. He's got himself into trouble lots of times because of it. He never stops to think or to care if anybody is offended or displeased by what he says or does. Finer shades of feeling find no response in him. His outlook and his sensibilities are coarse. The pen and brush are not for him. He understands physical exertion, the hammer, the crow-bar, the scythe, the whetted sword. These belong in his hands, as pitiless and righteous as the legendary battle-axe of Parasuram. Nilu declared once that he did not like poetry. I told him I would write a poem for him that he would like. So I wrote a sonnet about rich men and workers and so forth in a contentious style. Nilu liked it very much. I can't recall the verses now, not a line. Nilu framed the thing and hung it on the wall in Mother's room.

I can see Mother sitting in the courtyard. She is shaking her head and looking at Nilu. She makes a deprecatory sound by striking her tongue against her teeth. Then she improvises a doggerel, "Not even death changes a person's disposition!" Nilu looked at me as if to say, "I'm in for it now, Dada!" What we both expected happened. Mother recited the Sanskrit verse: *angara satadhoutena malinaschhana munchate.* Charcoal cannot be washed white. We burst out laughing. She had said it. Mother had said *'malinaschha.'* Our laughter made her realise that she had made a mistake, "Oh, how can I remember?" "Then why do you say it?" asked Nilu. We have all Mother's little foibles by heart. But it is always Nilu, not me, who points them out. Left to myself I might never notice them. Mother says, *'daya dakshinatya.'* One day I explained to her that the correct form is a *'daya dakshinya.'* But she always forgets when she is talking. I keep quiet because to remind her is to embarrass her. Nilu does not understand that. He notices the weaknesses of people and uses them as fuel for his sarcasm. He never stops to think that what he says may hurt the other person. We have always kept our distance with Father. We seldom discuss anything with him except the necessary. Nilu

and I sit down to our meal with Mother after Father and all the others in the Ashram have been served. Mother always has to have a little milk. This is perhaps the only indulgence she permits herself. Many people, guests, arrive and depart regularly. Milk often runs short. When there is not much left Mother gives it to Nilu and me. I used to pour some into a bowl and set it aside for Mother. If Nilu saw me he was certain to exclaim, "Oh, Mother can't take a meal without it! She has to have her milk." An embarrassed look would come over Mother's face although it was a trifling matter. It was as if she had been caught in some secret indulgence. Nilu notices so many things but he did not notice that.

When Mother falls ill it seems to please her if anyone thinks her condition is serious enough to express concern. So I make a show of putting my hand on her forehead and crying, "You're on fire! Your temperature is very high." If Nilu happens to be present he shakes the room with his laughter.

I felt quite pleased with myself when I told the Superintendent that I did not need anything, not only pleased, proud. The English Superintendent did not come alone. With him were the Jailor, the doctor, the Assistant Jailor, Head Warder, several bodyguards and the convict who is now a trusty. And, oh yes, I've forgotten the Sikh prisoner who carries the Superintendent's big umbrella, the royal khaki umbrella, running around behind him. With the force at his disposal in the prison the Superintendent is all-powerful, an absolute monarch. I could not look at any of the others after I had given my answer to his question. Everything seemed to blur. Yet I wanted to know the effect my answer had on them. I felt like the hero of a drama. Tears used to spring to my eyes when, as a child, I listened to the stories Santosh told me about the heroes of the Swadeshi Movement. The vision of the immortal dead floated before me. I compared myself to those who, mortally wounded, cried, "Let me die in peace. Don't trouble me any more." I wept for them. Have the hearts of those who have heard my story not been stirred? Perhaps not! They see this sort of thing all the time. They are elderly, experienced in worldly affairs, not impetuous or emotional like the young. I seem to want people to praise me, to talk about me. In this I am weak. At times I suspect myself. Am I more concerned for

my name and fame than for the future of the country? Is it true? I have never, not for a single day, lost myself in the coarser pleasures of life. I've never hesitated to do what it seemed to me to be good for the country. I've never considered my personal happiness, my future or possible suffering. Is it unfair if I want my countrymen to speak of me with approval, with praise? The doctor must surely have said something about me at home. The Assistant Jailor may have gone to the Upper Division Ward to tell the other political prisoners about my answer. Father is in that ward. Surely they will tell him. Father is imperturbable. There is no way of knowing what he feels. Neither his face nor his manner betray his emotion. He must be sitting a little apart, spinning. His thread may blur. There'll be moisture in the corner of his eye. But no, I do not expect Father to show as much emotion as that. Perhaps he'll be just a little inattentive, his concentration on his spinning may falter, his thread will break once or twice more than usual . . . I begin to doubt, I'm afraid. Have I been able to create the impression on the jail staff that I wanted to create? I could not speak loudly and I lowered my eyes. Perhaps they concluded that my heart is not so very stout after all. My manner perhaps betrayed too much resentment against authority. They deal with thieves and robbers and murderers all the time. Many of their finer feelings and kinder impulses have atrophied. They do not regard political prisoners as in any way different from ordinary ones. Any difference of treatment is attributable to fear of trouble or their self-interest. The same doctor who curses Class III prisoners when they are sick, who, when a prisoner says he has dysentery and asks for medicine shouts irritably, "Don't expect to get curd!" as if the prisoner has deliberately contracted an illness in order to get curd and must therefore be forewarned that the ruse won't work, is as gentle as the earth to Upper Class political prisoners. Two years ago, at the time of the Individual Civil-Disobedience Movement, I saw this jail staff, the same people, dancing attendance on the Congress leaders and taking every opportunity to flatter them. At that time they still thought the Congress might form a ministry again in Bihar. And today!

Have I been able to influence these people by my behaviour? By what I said to the Superintendent? It would have made a

deeper impression if I had declaimed loudly, "I don't want pity or anything else from you. Kill the cow and present him with a pair of shoes!" That would have been a bit theatrical but my purpose would have been accomplished. I remember the speech Sukdeo made in Ward No. 2 after the prisoners had been beaten up in October. He was hurt on the head and he spoke lying down, in his injured condition--a long soliloquy like a death scene in a play. "You people have no sense of shame." he began. I can still hear the words clearly. Once in school I recited *Meghnad Badh* at a Prize Distribution. I had been coached by the Assistant Headmaster, Kali Babu. "Up to this point," he said, "you will speak lying down, resting on your elbow. Then you lie down completely, close your eyes and drag out your words slowly, *ke ba e kalanka tor bhunjibe jagate kalanki.* Sukdeo's speech was entirely out of keeping with the environment. But I noticed that not many of those present felt its inappropriateness.

"Have you eaten, Babu?"

The thread of my thoughts breaks. The warder is standing in front of me. There is a trace of sympathy in the tone of his voice. He procured a light and set it outside the door a long time ago. I had not noticed. I don't know what harm it would do to put the light inside the cell. To commit suicide by soaking one's clothes in kerosene is not a comfortable way to die. Still they do not dare to incur the risk. Perhaps they are right. Every rule they have is the result of experience. The mutiny in the jail last year failed because of just such a nonsensical rule. The prisoners killed the guard at the gate and took possession of the keys. But there were nearly two hundred keys on the huge ring and most of them were useless The jail rules require that a number of such keys be kept on the ring. The rebels could not find the one that fitted the gate lock. Five minutes were lost in trying one key after another. By that time the alarm had been sounded. Guns and soldiers had arrived. And then—

"What time is it?" I have not answered the warder's question, asking a question myself instead.

"Time to change guards." The warders who are on night duty have arrived. Count of the prisoners is being made in the central tower. How many are in each ward? How many new ones have come in during the day? How many have been

released? Are all the prisoners in their places? The warder has not forgotten his question. Again he asks, "You've not eaten, have you?"

He has noticed that my rice is untouched. "No, I'm not hungry," I answered.

"There's curd," he says, "You ought to take a little of some thing." Lower Class prisoners are given curd once a week. The curd is thin and has a burnt smell. It is poured over the metal plate. For Third Class political prisoners this curd is a standing joke because the Congress Ministry introduced it as a measure of reform. The big Congress leaders are the butt of their laughter. Why have they not arranged for all political prisoners to be kept in the same class, a single class? What is the meaning of Upper Class political prisoners and Lower Class political prisoners? An Upper Class prisoner is allowed ten annas worth of food per day and a Lower Class prisoner gets three and a half annas. Why couldn't they create a class midway between these two extremes, a class exclusively for political prisoners? What harm would it do if Lower Class prisoners were given the right to spend a little of their own money? Would it spoil any rice for the authorities if prisoners were allowed to receive gifts of food from outside? Would it defile the Mahabharata to permit them to write two letters a month? What harm could it do for the prisoners to buy cigarettes with their own money? There are many complaints.

A voice thunders in a singsong from the high central tower: "Answer, No 1! Answer, No 2! Answer, No 3! Answer, No 5! Answer, No 6! Answer! New round! Answer!"

Not all the warders' answers are audible. Perhaps I cannot hear them from here. The soldier in the tower does not appear to expect a reply from every ward. His work is mechanical. He shouts at regular intervals. His voice is like a gramophone. The number of prisoners in each ward is shouted back in reply. The jail officials have the total added up from beforehand, in the room below the tower. The shouting out is only a formality. The trusties in all the wards know it. The guards too. Answering is a waste of labour for them. They don't often bother about it. The gong has been struck twice. The counting is over. It is past nine. I'll not have to listen to the counting of these children any more. The light on the tower must be 500

candle-power. It has a black shade because of the blackout. A large umbrella of woven bamboo is exactly under the light. It protects the guard from sun and rain. The tower has been painted black also because of the blackout. But the umbrella beneath the light reflects it so brightly that one cannot look at it for long at a time. The umbrella defeats the blackout precautions completely. The tower and the umbrella beneath it remind me of Ahalya Bai Ghat at Benares. We used to meet every evening in the tower above the Ghat. Sinheswar Sinha spat from it one day. What a commotion that caused! He had a strange daring. Death did not frighten him at all. I envied the disdain with which he used to refer to the gallows. I knew that he wanted me to join their group. But I could not do the things he wanted me to do. Sometimes I feel it was lack of courage on my part that prevented me from joining them more than a distaste for their methods. But where is my fear today? "I've heard that the older people get the more frightened of death they become. Is my case the exception to the rule? What a lot we would have to say to each other if I could meet Sinheswar now! I saw him a long time after Benares, unexpectedly, at the Ramgarh Congress. He was released from Bareilly Jail during the Congress Ministry. He had been sentenced in a mail robbery case. I don't remember where it happened. It was near Lucknow, at a place called Piparaha or something like that.

The new warder has come. I had not noticed. When he asked me, "Babu, would you like a smoke?" I was startled out of my reverie.

Even the warders wish to be friendly with me today. Can they do anything for me? Can they please me? This sympathy is spontaneous. It is not in the least affected. Perhaps my refusal has hurt him a little. He is carrying out his duty with a reluctant air. He rattles the lock and shakes the bars of the iron door. He should have done that before, in the presence of the other warder. The object is to see whether the door is properly shut and bolted. The prisoner can have persuaded the last warder to leave the door unlocked. That warder is not responsible now for the escape of the prisoner. He has relinquished his charge. This is the reason for the precaution. The last warder has already left. He couldn't wait to get away. After eight hours on duty at a stretch he's as impatient to get home as a

cow at eventide. How can one blame him!

Noticing the new warder's discomfiture I ask him whether he has looked at the other cells.

"Yes," he answers, "There are prisoners in five of them, Nos. 10, 9, 7, 3 and 1. I began with Cell No. 10 today. The ward guard is having a chat outside somewhere. The guard from Cell No. 3 and I were given the job of counting."

These cells are, in the jargon of the jail, called the condemned cells. There are five prisoners in them. This ward is called the Gallows Ward. When I hear the word condemned used in reference to these cells I always think of them as condemned by the engineering department as uninhabitable. It does not readily come to my mind that they are called condemned cells because prisoners condemned to death are kept in them. In Cells Nos. 9 and 10 are two bomb case prisoners under trial. I don't know why they have been put there. This prison has forty or fifty cells other than the cells in this ward. Yet these two have been put here. It's difficult to see why. Perhaps it's police orders. They may hope to get a confession out of them and are keeping them in isolation. The man in No. 7 is a lunatic. He babbles nonsense to himself. Whenever he sees the warder he curses him foully. The doors of Cells No. 9 and No. 10 are left open all day. Sometimes the two bomb case accused give my special warder cigarettes, sugar or something else and in exchange are allowed to say a few words to me. The doors of their cells are locked in the evening. They tease the lunatic to pass the time. Teasing makes him angry. He starts cursing if he is called by his name. The warders say the the man's madness is feigned. They have, they say, seen many such. "The Government is not so easily taken in!" they say, "He can't get a reprieve this way." The man in Cell No. 3 has been convicted for murder. He killed his brother. It's an ugly story. His wife described his sordid and obscene family life in front of everybody, standing on the judge's dais. He appealed to the High Court but his suit has been rejected. The fellow cries, "Sitaram! Sitaram!" day and night. He sings devotional songs.

I do not like it when the warder refers to me as a convict. It seems to me he should use some politer word. It is difficult to efface entirely the imprint of the teaching, the ideas and the

habits of my childhood. The warder only speaks the truth. What else should he call me? Today I am the chief convict in this jail. The man in Cell No. 1 is the man who is the next to be executed. Beyond Cell No. 1 is a door. This door is opened only to take a prisoner to the gallows. The rest of the time it is shut. I would like to get a look at that door before the supreme moment! Is the lock rusty? All that stands between me and death is that door. Yet my heart protests when I am called a convict. When the warder refers to the bomb men as accused it does not grate on my ears. Is it that I am familiar with the phrase 'bomb case accused'? Many patriotic memories are woven around those words. For nationalists it has unforgettable associations. At least it has for me. But the word convict makes me think of ordinary robbers and murderers. The connection is inescapable. The warder puts me on their level, identifies me with criminals, when he uses it. Or so it seems to me. That is why I dislike it so much and resent its use. It hurts. In the eyes of the warder I am not an honoured patriot! I expect admiration from him, if not in fact at least in manner. Admiration for the sacrifice I am making! I am giving my life for these people and where is their gratitude? Instead of gratitude they offer me sympathy, not sympathy for a martyr but just simple pity for an unfortunate fellow who has only a few hours more to enjoy this delightful earth.

I remember Auntie. I went to Naihati Station to put her on the westbound train. Her hair was cropped short and she was wearing an orange robe. There was a narrow string of small basil beads around her throat. She has little contact with her own family. Her time is spent in ashrams and Maths and she was on her way to Brindavan from Nabadwip. There was a great deal of luggage with her, green coconuts, sacks of the golden lentil called moog, tins of sweetmeats made from soft cheese, sesamum. These were for her brother and sister disciples. It was to put them into her railway compartment that I had come. Auntie got in. I took the baggage off the heads of the coolies and put it in after her. "Is everything here?" Auntie asked. "Yes," I answered, "twenty-two pieces of baggage in all." Her smile vanished. Her face darkened. In her grief and anger her eyes filled with tears. I realised that unwittingly I had made a serious mistake. Auntie cleared up the mystery a little later.

She explained that I had included the oil painting of her guru which was wrapped in silk with the other luggage, counting it as one item. To me it was no more than another piece of baggage. Auntie's psychology struck me as odd at the time. But today I am surprised at my own reaction to the word convict. It would be odd not to refer to a condemned man as a convict.

The gallows platform is redolent with the fragrant memory of many martyrs. Call it a gallows tree and the vision of a common criminal is immediately evoked. The most surprising thing is that in my mind's eye I behold a corpse dangling from the kind of horizontal bar used in gymnastic exercises. The limp feet turn slowly in space, in a slow monotonous way, north, northeast, east, southeast, south, southeast, east, northeast, north. It's a scene I read in some English novel.

The warder said he had begun his duty at Cell No. 10. That means Cells 11 to 20 are empty today. Prisoners who break the jail rules or are disorderly are punished by the authorities with solitary confinement usually. They are kept in these cells. For some time they have to stay there alone. I cannot understand what punishment is involved in being alone for a few days. It ought not to be a punishment to get away from the uproar of the wards now and then. These cells are used a great deal. How is it that they are all empty today? Such a thing never happens. Perhaps the occupants have been removed elsewhere on purpose. The Superintendent may have pardoned their offences. He may want as few people as possible in the condemned ward tonight. To be here tonight might have a bad effect on them. All those who can be removed have been sent elsewhere. What the master wants is done. Have they taken the leper in Cell No. 13 into the general ward also? Different Superintendents have different ideas. Major Philpots never allowed a book with pictures of women in it to come into the jail. I have heard that he was well-versed in diseases of the mind. He was of the opinion that the minds of men who have been long in prison might be adversely affected by pictures of the female body. What a quarrel he had over it with Ramkhelaon Babu in the Hazaribagh jail! Poor Ramkhelaon Babu was given his precious Royal Academy Annual only after ten or fifteen pages had been carefully cut out. We do not know what effect they would have had on his mind if he had

been given them but we saw the effect produced by his being deprived of them. Philpots also saw it. Ramkhelaon Babu was punished with fourteen days in solitary confinement.

It's very hot! The cell has no ventilation. It's the middle of May. It may be as hot outside the cell as inside. I sit here, on the floor beside the door, in the hope of getting a little coolness from outside. The closed air of the cell is thick and makes my head feel heavy. I've noticed at such times that if I press my nose and face as far through the bars as possible the heaviness in my head slowly disappears. I drink in the free air from outside. My head doesn't trouble me as much as it used to. The warder has been giving me a little mustard oil before my bath for some days now. He gets it for me from somewhere. He keeps it in an old butter tin. At first I thought I would not accept it, this pity for a condemned man! But when he poured a little into the palm of my hand without a word I could not refuse. The thought of my headache might have deterred me or it may have been because the man gave it to me silently. These people know no restraint in their speech. They are on duty for eight hours in the day and two hours at night. The life they lead is very monotonous. Talking relieves it. But he did not say a word and in addition he gave me a small quantity of mustard oil, denying himself. Wonderful! These people steal all they can lay hands on from the jail. Washing soap, fried rice, peanuts, potatoes, rope made of coconut fibre, nails, screw caps for their lanterns and other things of this kind never escape their fingers. Everything that belongs to Upper Class prisoners, from tea cups to towels, is stolen during the night when everyone in the jail except the warders is locked into the wards. Thievery goes on unabated although the thieves are under lock and key. The generosity of this warder overwhelmed me. I was even more surprised the other day when he made the lunatic wash my jacket and short pants for me. I had finished my bath and put on dry clothes when he almost forced me into my cell. He didn't give me a chance to protest. Then he loosened his belt, put his hand inside his pants and brought out a cigarette He handed the cigarette to the lunatic and gave him a light with his own match. I understood it was the poor creature's reward for washing my clothes. It's difficult to refuse a service which is performed silently. It seemed to me

that this warder at least is aware of the sacrifice I am making, of my patriotism—not like the others! The thought made my heart light. He has been on day duty for some time now.

Chandrima, a member of our party, never uses oil on his head. He claims oil makes his head feel hot. He's a small man, short in stature, a tireless, straightforward, silent worker. He's delighted to be of use to anybody. All day long he's on the move, going round and round Ward No. 2, like a spinwheel. His hair is thick, quite long and unkempt. He never oils it. In 1932, during the Satyagraha Movement, he was at the Milikgunj Congress Ashram. A cycle pump was used to blow air into his ear. He has been deaf ever since. I can see him, Chandrima, arranging a meeting tomorrow morning in Ward No. 2. A silent meeting. To mourn. Rambhajan Babu will preside. Everybody will stand up with him in silence. Then they'll sit down again slowly. Chandrima will keep on standing. Pushing the heavy mass of his disorderly hair behind his ear—his hair is like a lion's mane—he'll begin to speak. "My brother slaves," he cries, standing in the posture of a man who is handcuffed and has been dragged to his feet, "Today • " A murmur will rise around him. They are asking Chandrima to stop. Information about the meeting might already be on its way to the authorities. A clubbing may follow at any moment. "How many informers are there amongst us?" "Are speeches appropriate at such a meeting?" "He's obstinate. He won't listen to us" These and similar remarks are audible. But Chandrima goes on talking, telling them about me, my sacrifice... my devotion to my country... about our personal friendship... giving his sympathy to the Upper Division prisoner, Master Saheb, my father, to the saintly Deviji who is my mother, now a prisoner in the Women's Ward, praying that she may be granted the strength to bear this blow. A family of patriots! What a shining picture his words paint, an ideal for India. The duty of his hearers - his words lead him on. There are tears in the corners of his half-shut eyes. Hands take hold of him and he is helped to sit down. It is resolved to fast for the day in token of respect for the departed soul. Chandrima has always objected to fasting. His party does not think that fasting is of any value. Chandrima explains to doubters that this fast is not penitential nor undertaken to bring about a change of heart in the

enemy but to show their regard for Bilu Babu and their love for their country.

The members of the Congress Socialist Party will meet afterwards under the peepul tree in Ward No. 2. Gore Singh will speak. "We must look at everything objectively . . . it is the duty of every Marxist to do so . . ." More in the same strain. They are proud of the contribution their party has made to the national struggle. The death of a comrade does not overwhelm them with grief. They do not admit that the loss of one can harm the party very much. Many will come and many will go. These men, a good number of them if not all, have come into the political field after breaking their family ties, in spite of social opposition. Not one will hesitate to give his life for his ideal. And because they think so little of their own lives they have little regard for the lives of others. Comrade Bhola is sitting at the back. He is smiling. I have noticed a strange thing among political prisoners. Men who have sacrificed everything for their country, their personal ambitions, their future, men who always hold themselves ready to give their lives also, do the meanest things in prison to gain the most inconsequential advantages. Comrade Bhola has escaped the gallows but he has been given thirty-three years on several combined charges. His face is always lit with a smile. He is by nature impossibly gay. Not even the gallows could efface that smile. The more dangerous a thing is the more he enjoys doing it. He is a devoted and simple-hearted boy who carries out orders unhesitatingly though his powers of thought are not great. Yet I have seen him come to blows with Kaleswar Prasad over the chillies in his lentil soup.

Jail employees always take note of these weaknesses among political prisoners. How can they feel the same respect for them that the people of the country do? This may be the reason I am so eager to have their esteem. It means more to me than the esteem of others. One day I heard the Jailor say to the Superintendent that the prisoners in Cells No. 9 and No. 10 are very good for, he explained, they never grouse or grumble. This is the yardstick of their praise. When the Superintendent asked me what I wanted the Jailor took out a notebook and a pencil. He was prepared to make a note of my needs. I must have disappointed him a lot.

The Jailor was standing over there that day, where the jug of water is, just outside the cell.

A jug of water is kept in front of the cell. It isn't put inside in order to prevent me from committing suicide. All the prisoners in the ward are supplied with water from the same jug, of course with the exception of those in No. 9 and No. 10. When anyone is thirsty he calls the warder or rings the cell bell. The warder responds at his own convenience, getting up to pour out the water when he feels like it. A prisoner is seldom given water when he asks for it. When the number of entreaties grows, when they become clamorous, the fellow gets up slowly and tips the jug. Cell No. 1 is given special consideration. That is why the jug is kept in front of my door. I pull the neck of the jug through the bars and pour out a drink for myself. I splash the water into my face and eyes, trying to do it so that the water falls outside the cell. My face and eyes are burning. There is no outlet for water in the cell. The water is supposed to drain out under the door. There now. Most of the water has fallen inside. I rinse my mouth and spit outside, aiming at the spot where, in the crevice between floor and wall, a tiny plant is sprouting. Every day I water it this way. I try to break my own record in hitting it every time I rinse my mouth. How far can I throw the stream of water? Now I have a rough idea. I stand, sit, change the expression of my face, testing myself in various ways, trying always to outdo myself. At noon the cement floor outside gets so hot it almost reaches the smoking point. Then I rinse out my mouth and spit on it. I count to see how long it takes the water to evaporate entirely. I don't know what the plant is. The leaves are tobacco-coloured. They look like the leaves of the *neem*. I can see them plainly because the lantern is close. A small, clinging sort of plant, clutching at the wall. The tiny yellow flowers cannot be seen by lantern light. How desperately it struggles to live! The crack between the cement and the bricks is narrow. But through it the plant manages to draw the strength to survive, to grow. It will be here after I am gone. It is not dependent upon the water I give it. I think it must be the kind of plant from which a thick white milky liquid oozes when the stem is broken. The plant we call *kshiruee* or *kshetpara* has that kind of sap. An aunt of mine once put a

little of it on a boil at the base of my neck, to make it burst. Nilu and I kept the milky sap in an old earthen lamp in Durga's playroom for a long time afterwards.

Durga's little sister, Tepi, wore her hair in pigtails and her dress was always a little soiled. Nilu and I took her to the rubber tree on the Ganges-Darjeeling road not far from the Ashram. We wanted to show her how the sap is collected and made into rubber. I climbed up the tree and made an incision in the bark with a knife. A thick white liquid welled out and trickled down, drop by drop. Nilu caught hold of Tepi and held her underneath. "Don't look up! Be careful!" he shouted to her, "I'm going to make an eraser on your head." How Tepi cried afterwards! The sap congealed in her hair. We two brothers got a good beating from Mother that day. It was lucky for us that Father was away. Tepi died about a month later. What mental agony that caused Nilu and I! How much we repented what we had done! We sat under the rain tree in the Ashram and talked ourselves into the conviction that by putting rubber sap in her hair we had given her diptheria. Nilu told me that when Dr. Kartik cut open Tepi's throat, he had taken white rubbery stuff out. Tepi's mother brought all the children in the house over to the Ashram. Tepi's brother, Bhonda, became a lawyer this year. How small he was at that time! He slept beside Mother. He cried to go home that night.

The floor in front of the door is wet. I cannot sit here. I wipe it dry with my short blue-striped pants. It doesn't matter if they get dirty. I won't have to wear them tomorrow. Nine years ago, during the Bihar earthquake, this part of the floor sank. The depression is still there bearing witness to the inefficiency of the Public Works Department. And why should the man assigned to Cell No. 1 be so particular! This cell is the one next to the gallows. It is occupied by the man whose turn to be hanged has come. Of all the four thousand five hundred inhabitants of this prison I have the greatest claim to this cell. The assumptions of the Public Works Department are not wrong. The man in this cell does not live long enough to contract rheumatism from sitting on the damp floor. And if the prisoner has the cat luck to have his mercy petition granted a slight disability is not worth complaining about. I still feel, even on this day, that sitting here may make me

sick. I once read a story about a man on the point of committing suicide. He had lifted the bottle of poison to his lips. At that moment a friend happened to see him. He drew a revolver and shouted, "Throw that glass away! I'll shoot." The glass dropped from his hand. Who can make out the way the heart works?

Perhaps nobody noticed the depression in front of the door when repairs were made after the earthquake. The engineer is not very much to blame. It is slight. Only when water is spilled on the floor and collects in it does the depression show. What a catastrophe the earthquake was! The one in 1934. The Government released all the political prisoners in North Bihar so they could take relief to the sufferers. The Patna Camp Jail was emptied. Nilu had been released earlier, at the end of 1932. Mother and Father were both in prison. Nilu was going to school. He stayed with Aunt Jathaima We travelled by the B.N W. line. Every station bore the marks of the havoc wrought by the earthquake. We had to wait a whole day near Pashara Station or somewhere in the neighbourhood. The bridge was gone. Arrangements were made for us to cross the river by boat. The Government had given us three annas each for our food on the journey. We struck a bargain with the curd-seller in the marketplace beside the river. He agreed to allow us to eat as much curd as we could for an anna apiece. Nagindar Singh ate eight or ten pounds! It was unsweetened curd, pinkish, made from *mahua.* We had no money with us except the three annas. So we had to walk from Karagol Road Station to Purnea. There were enormous cracks in the Ganges-Darjeeling road. The Hardar bridge was broken into pieces. When we at last reached Hardar market our legs refused to carry us any further. A Congress worker named Dubeyji lives there. When we presented ourselves at his shop his wife hurried into the house to reappear a minute later murmuring, "Pranam !" She had changed her mill-made sari for one of homespun. Her complexion was fair. She was still beautiful, even at her age. Her carriage was erect and her nose as high and aquiline as a parrot's beak. Her face and eyes shone with a self-command which added much to her loveliness. With what care Dubeyji and his wife looked after us! We feasted on flattened rice soaked in milk with curd added. We ate to our heart's content. The atmosphere was gay.

Dubeyji bore the brunt of our joking. We all tried to imitate his Bhojpuri accent. How we laughed when Dubeyji tried to pronounce his words correctly and failed! The old gentleman and lady joined in our laughter. Sitting by the fireside I talked with Dubeyji's wife until late in the night. I talked about my Mother and about how it was time for me to marry. She had made salt during the Salt Satyagraha and gone to prison. For some reason or other the police had not arrested Dubeyji, perhaps because of his age. His wife had felt a little superior ever since, at least Dubeyji complained that she did. They are most simple-hearted, this old couple. They have given all the land they possess to the Congress. Later that night when I was in bed and they thought we were all sleeping they brought more blankets and spread them over us quietly lest we be disturbed. Before we left them the following day they took me aside to the local primary school and said, "We have a request to make. We have no children of our own. We've known you a long time, ever since you were so high! The Master Saheb's son is a son to us also. We are poor people. You are Bengalis, Bilu Babu, but you must promise to do something for us. We have spent the income from what land we possess for the cause of the Congress. We want to make a deed of gift while we are still here. After we are dead you must use the land for Mahatmaji's work. How much longer do we have?" I gave them my word. She may still be up tonight, praying in front of her icon of Rama. Rama rides in a chariot of coloured paper. She may be spinning by the light of her oil lamp. Tussar silk yarn.

We reached Purnea from Hardar Bazar the noon of the following day. The Gandhi Ashram had been closed down by the authorities. Yet it was to the Ashram that we went. From the distance I could see the rain tree beside the District Congress Office. It was covered with the golden yellow flowers of a begonia creeper. It was I who planted the creeper at the base of the tree. In the old days when the national flag fluttered at the top of the flag pole it could be seen a long way off. The flag had been taken down but the rain tree with its rich green, the yellow of the begonia and the white of the clouds in the sky behind them served the purpose of a flag very well. The three colours! The Ashram buildings were thatched. The fence around

our house was missing. The upper part of the pump was gone. The lock which the Sub-Divisional Officer had put on the door, sealing it, had disappeared without trace. The room was empty. Only a bedstead and a clothes press were there. Everything portable had been removed. Even the door of the kitchen had gone. The photograph of Gandhi had been stolen. I could not find the owl that Nadidi had made out of cotton, framed, and hung on the wall. The sampler Saraswati worked when she was a little girl with the motto "Untouchability is a sin," was also gone. My poem, the one Nilu pasted on a piece of cardboard and fastened to the wall, was still there. The writing had faded and was indistinct. And my portrait of Rabindranath was still there. No one had thought these worth taking. Perhaps they had not been taken because they were not framed. Even the flowers had been stolen from the garden. But pink and white periwinkles filled the courtyard in wild profusion. Don't goats and cows eat them? Here and there a castor bush lifted its head haughtily above the lowly periwinkles. The silkworm shed had collapsed completely. Some one had taken the wheels off the ox cart. The shed for the oil press was still standing but a thick growth of bushes resembling the lentil, *arahar,* choked it. It was impossible to go in. Not a single book was left in the library. Piles of refuse lay in the hall. There was every evidence of goats and cows being stabled there. Our neighbours had not forgotten the Congress buildings!

I felt depressed. Leaving the Ashram I went to Aunt Jathaima's house. They are my father's close friends. A tent had been set up in front of the house. A white goat stood in the doorway chewing an embroidered tablecloth. Buriya, Nadidi's little girl, was lying on her stomach gazing fixedly down into the large crack which split the field. Her playmates were with her. They all ran up when they caught sight of me.

"What were you doing over there?" I asked.

"Little Uncle said we could see America through the crack." Buriya answered and ran shouting into the house, "Grannie! Come and see who has come!"

Aunt Jathaima and Nadidi were having lunch. "Where's Nadidi?" I called as I stepped through the door. Both of them left their food and came out. Aunt Jathaima drew me to her with her left arm. The fingers of her right hand were soiled

with food. I learned that Nilu was in the house. He came out, rubbing his eyes. "Now you've spoiled Auntie's lunch," he said, "Sit down and finish it." He gave a laugh. "Don't listen to him!" exclaimed Nadidi, "We've finished lunch." There was mock anger in her face and eyes. Aunt Jathaima began to scold him. "You slept in that tumble-down room again! The roof is about to collapse. Do you want it to fall on you? I can't do anything with you! I refuse to let you stay here any more. Go to your Uncle's. You're a robber, a dacoit! Did you have to sleep in that room again last night?"

We talked and talked. Nilu's suggestion was acted upon. I sat down in Auntie's place and finished her lunch. Her house was always just like our own to us. We used to speak of it as 'the other house'.

I remember Auntie. Her front teeth are large and protrude. There is a blue tatoo mark between her eyebrows. Her face is small and her hair iron-grey. She is always smiling. And when she smiles one notices that two of her lower front teeth are missing. She wears a plain silk tussar sari without a border. A rare motherliness is in everything she does, in her speech, her face, her eyes. Raphael's madonnas are solemn. In some way they are constrained. The figures lack spontaneity, their movements are stiff. Their dignity is as artificial as that of a hospital nurse. Aunt Jathaima is like a painting of Jasoda by an Indian artist, a *patua* painter. Its execution may be less perfect but it evokes a stronger inner response. Auntie feels for all the children in the neighbourhood the way my Mother feels for Nilu and me. Her door is always open. And I am proud of the fact that my place is foremost. Nilu teases her, accusing her of favouritism. She puts food aside for me, delicacies which she does not divide among the others. Once while I was in prison Aunt Jathaima fell very ill. She expressed her determination to leave all her property to me. It was found that her property consisted of twenty-four rupees in an old pillow case. There was also a pot of stale *ghee*. She had put a little *ghee* aside every month. Nilu loves to repeat these stories, teasing her in and out of season.

Once I took Aunt Jathaima to her ancestral village to attend the wedding of her brother's grand-daughter. The village was a small one near Pabna, on the banks of the Jumna. She showed me

around the village. We went to the homestead of her family physician, the *kaviraj*, the landlord's dilapidated temple, the ancestral home of the noble family the very mention of whose name made barren trees bear fruit and tigers and cattle drink amicably together at the same watering place. Many other places. I had heard so many stories about all these places from my childhood that none of them seemed strange to me. As we were walking along the bank of the Son-in-law Lake Aunt Jathaima pointed out to me the spot where Dr. Nabadwip fell off his cycle. "There was only one cycle in the district then," she said, "We had all come out to see it. The poor fellow rolled off into the water, cycle and all." I said, "Aunt Jathaima, you told me that happened on the Ferry Fund Road." "Well, well!" she cried, "but this *is* the Ferry Fund Road! It runs along the bank of the pond. And see here, I'll tell you something. Sit down beside me. I don't like to be called Auntie in the least. Why can't you call me Mother?" I was flabbergasted. She was waiting for an answer with eager and questioning eyes. A deep maternal tenderness lit her face. The question was so unexpected it took me some time to think of a reply. At last I said, "Auntie and Mother are much the same. There's not much difference." My answer embarrassed her. "You have a mother. It was wrong of me to ask that," she said guiltily. Her eyes were on the opposite bank of the pond but she was not looking at anything in particular.

From then on I have called her Mother when no one else is present. Everybody knows I do it but still, having always called her Auntie in front of others, I feel diffident about doing anything else. The habit is strong. I cannot make out why she should so suddenly take it into her head that I should call her Mother, there, beside the pond, at the place where poor Dr. Nabadwip fell off his cycle.

What I was afraid of happened not long after. Mother resented my calling Aunt Jathaima 'Mother.' Nilu and I had sat down to our meal on the porch of the kitchen. Mother was serving us. She would sit down with us as soon as the serving was over. We always ate together. Suddenly I said, "Do you know Mother, how Aunt Jathaima makes that curry with *jhinga* and linseed? It's very good."

"Why don't you eat there?" Mother demanded, "Is there any need for you to come here?"

What an answer to an innocent question! Mother is usually gentle and sweet in her speech. The heat of her words surprised me. "I told Mother today," Nilu spoke up, "that you've started calling Auntie 'Mother.' She's angry. See."

It was true. When Mother is angry her manner is stiff and formal. Nilu is such a stupid! He might have told me first, not in front of Mother. The tears started to her eyes. She hurried away to the kitchen to conceal her emotion. It seemed to me that I had committed a serious offence.

The ward where Mother is has been named *Aoratkita.* She'll not sleep today. Most probably she has let her mosquito net down and is sitting inside it, telling her beads. Nilu was sick when he was in Deuli Camp Prison. That was the beginning of last year. Suddenly news came that Nilu had been operated on for appendicitis. In the Ajmer Hospital. Mother spent the whole night in the family chapel. She came out once, about eleven o'clock, entered my room and began groping around on the shelves next the mirror as if looking for something. I felt she probably wanted to talk to me about Nilu's illness. Yet she lacked the courage to ask for fear that I might say something about the danger to his life or the serious nature of his case. Perhaps telling her beads had not given her enough strength. Mother thought my eyes were on my book, that I was not watching her. With the greatest reverence she bowed before the photograph of Gandhiji. Then she began unfolding and refolding the tidy pile of clothes on the rack. "An apendicitis operation is an everyday affair," I said, "Everybody recovers. In England nowadays even healthy people have it done." Mother pretended that she was not in the least interested. "How far is Deuli from Ajmer?" she asked. The rest of the night she told her beads.

A warder is calling from the tower in a singsong. "Answer, Segregation Ward! Answer, Juvenile!" It's isn't late after all. The guards in most of the wards answer automatically. The warder sings out, "Answer there!" When he called, "Answer No 5!" the answer was so long in coming I counted up to sixteen. A warder explained to me one day that singing out their calls is less of an effort than shouting and there is no danger of going hoarse. Each ward consists of four large halls, two above and two below. In jail jargon these halls are called stables.

An answer has come from the first hall in Ward No. 5. The voice is harsh, rasping, "No. 5. First stable. 100 inmates. Prisoners, locks, bolts, all right!" His voice makes me see his coarse, iron-grey moustache the tufts of which cover the whole of his face. He is most conscientious. The blue cap on his head indicates that he is on duty. Every month the Government deducts four annas from his pay and deposits the money in his account as savings. In exchange he keeps watch for two hours every night. Why should he neglect his duty when he eats the salt of the Government? The answers from the other three stables of Ward No. 5 are indistinct. None of them was given in full. Their voices sounded like the call of a village watchman in the stillness of the night-'Ho-o-hai!' They make no effort to form words. They comply with the regulations with the minimum exertion. These men are surely white caps, trusties who have been in jail longer than the warders. They are paid eight annas a month. They know a great deal about the jail, learned from experience. They know, for instance, that the reduction of their sentences does not depend upon the way they do their duty. And they also know how to keep the Head Warder satisfied. A trusty is a person of some consequence. He has many prisoners in his charge and in order to keep them in control he has to show a certain contempt for the jail authorities and the jail rules.

"Answer, Segregation Ward!" I listened eagerly to hear whether Ward No. 6 would answer after Ward No. 5, the Segregation Ward. From that one finds out whether the warder in the tower is new or not. Ward No. 6 is known as the 'Damuli Kita'. Life prisoners are kept there. These men mock the other prisoners, calling them pumpkin thieves. They look down upon them. All the warders treat these *damulis*, lifers, with respect. With the warders who have been in the jail a long time they have a standing arrangement. When these warders are on duty at the tower they allow the *damulis* to sleep in peace. They are spared the calling of the trusty and the counting. The poor fellows have to work in the jail factory all day long. Unless they are allowed to sleep undisturbed for a little while how can they do such hard labour all their lives? If the Warder is new he calls out, "Answer, Ward No. 6!" To look across at Ward No. 6 from Ward No. 2 makes me feel as though I am

standing on the platform of some big railway station. A junction. The Ward was built by a donation from some Raja Bahadur. The Raja Bahadur was undeniably original in selecting the object of his philanthrophy and in deciding what to donate and the purpose to which it should be devoted. I don't know whether in making the donation the Raja Bahadur satisfied any secret craving or not but the unfortunates who have to spend their lives in prison must certainly be grateful. Lifers are usually good fellows. There is none of the meanness or dishonesty of experienced thieves among them. They make the prison their home. One of them has planted a bush of basil in the courtyard. Many cultivate their own mint and chilli plants. How much tenderness they lavish on them! All the natural urges of parenthood, love and affection are poured out on these growing things, unstintedly.

How bitterly the Anglo-Indian fellow, Williams, wept the day he was released from Hazaribagh Prison! He had spent fourteen years there. The quince he planted was a large tree, his rose apple covered with lovely blossoms, soft as a powder puff. It was Williams who built a seat under the peepul. That caused a great deal of ill-feeling between the Superintendent and the Public Works Department. Williams gazed fondly at the seat and his trees and sobbed. I have seldom seen a grown man break down and cry like that. His sorrow at having to part from his jail companions was greater than his pleasure at the prospect of going home to his relatives again.

My right leg is numb. I've been sitting in the same position too long. I must walk up and down to get rid of the tingling. I always rest my weight on my right side when I sit in front of the door and cling to the bars. And I hold to the bars with my right hand. I don't, even absentmindedly, sit with my left shoulder against them or hold to them with my left hand.

How small we were then! We hadn't started going to school. The Headmaster's residence was next to the Boarding Hall. Father was at the school. Mother was chopping areca nuts. Nilu and I were arguing. Nilu maintained that the right side of Mother's lap belonged to him. If I wished, he said, I could have the left side. I don't know why but I felt deprived and insulted. Both of us put our hands on Mother's right knee and tried to establish our separate claims. In the resulting tussle

the reed basket full of chopped nuts was overturned. Nilu struck it with his foot. Mother slapped me on the back sharply, twice. "You're a big boy," she cried, "Aren't you ashamed? The older you grow the naughtier you become."

"Was it I who upset your nuts?" I asked.

"Not another word! If your little brother wants the right side of my lap let him have it. The right side is Nilu's. I almost cut my hand on the nut chopper."

Anger, shame and hurt brought tears to my eyes. I went off and sat down quietly at a distance. Nilu got up and went away not long after. His quarrelsomeness found no outlet when there was no one to dispute with him. I was aware that Mother had been watching me for some time. When she finished chopping the nuts she put the reed basket on the chest of drawers and came over to me. "Why are you so stupid?" she asked, "The left side of my lap is the best. Have you never noticed that when a baby is given its milk it lies with its head on its mother's left knee? The feeding spoon is held in the right hand. You have lain on both sides of my lap. The left is yours alone from now on. Come on, get up! Go and see what has become of that naughty brother of yours!" Her logic seemed irrefutable to me at the time.

My right leg is all right again. The warder came up to the door when he saw me get up and begin to walk about. He seems to want to know what I'm thinking. Why have I suddenly begun to walk up and down in my cell at the dead of night, in the dark? Perhaps he thinks my mind is disturbed. It would be odd if it were not on this day. The warder is watching me through the bars. He is a spectator at a zoo watching a wild animal in a cage.

I remember the zoo. Niresh was my friend. His grandmother came to Benares on pilgrimage. She was the second wife of an elderly landlord and had been widowed not long after her marriage. Her mother and father accompanied her. She was called Little Grandmother. Her youth astonished me. Niresh and I showed them the sights of Benares with pleasure and enthusiasm. We went to see the Raja's private zoo. When we were standing in front of the tiger's cage the tiger stretched its forelegs and gave a fierce growl. It looked like it was yawning. Little Grandmother cried out and clung

to me in terror. It was only for a second and very probably neither Niresh nor her parents noticed. If they did they saw nothing questionable in it. But what dreams I wove in my heart around that brief instant! I addressed her mother as 'Auntie' as Niresh suggested. Niresh took me to the place where they were staying in Benares and went straight into the kitchen where she was cooking. Auntie was a pleasant person. She could not talk much to us for she was shy of conversing with educated city boys, fearful of making a slip. When we entered the kitchen she exclaimed, "The moon's come down into a poor cottage!" I didn't understand what she meant. She stood there, her cooking spoon in her hand, smiling blankly. She was hesitant, self-conscious. We were busy looking after them for the next few days. I bought four different kinds of flashlights for Little Grandmother's father, searching the shops for them. Wherever he went out he thought of something like that. His speech was rough and unpolished, the speech of a rustic. He was the girl's guardian. In the absence of his son-in-law he looked after the property. He did not seem particularly grief-stricken because his only daughter was a widow. On the contrary his head seemed to have been turned a little by the opportunity to satisfy all the repressed desires of his former impoverished condition. The only person he was afraid of was his daughter. Her mother fell ill while they were in Benares. She refused to take medicine from anyone but me. I used to take her a green coconut every day, obtaining it from the house of a priest of Biswanath temple. As I entered the house Little Grandmother would call out, "Here he is! The young monk has come. Mother can be at peace at last." I was, at that time, in a self-disciplinary mood. I wore my hair long. I did not shave although I already had a moustache and beard. This was why she called me a monk. Whenever I think of her I see her as she was then, dressed in a blue sari. She wore twisted Bombay bracelets. A heavy gold chain hung around her neck. Her mother had not had the heart to force upon her the austere white dress of a widow. Her skin was dark and the blue sari, with a border design of clubs, was not at all becoming. Little Grandmother was a most ordinary village girl, without either beauty or talent to speak of. But the easy openness of her manner, the unaffectedness of her conversation and her pleasant

softness attracted me. Niresh and I went to the station to see them off. Niresh took her father to buy some spices which he remembered at the last moment. I stood on the station platform with my hands on the window sill of her carriage. She sat at the window, resting her hands on mine. Her eyes were full of tears. I could not look at her. "Dear monk," she stammered at last, "Come to see us." I promised. For a long time I intended to keep my promise. Everything seemed empty after she left. I could not put my mind on anything. A face floated in front of my eyes everywhere I went. I even frequented the Post Office in the hope of receiving a letter.

Little by little, unknown even to myself, the blue sari and the twisted Bombay bracelets faded from my memory. Four or five years ago when I was burning piles of old letters I found a blue sheet of paper on which were scrawled a few unpolished sentences. They seemed most uncouth. "Dear monk," she wrote, "do not forget me at your wedding feast. I've scrapped the inside of my stomach in anticipation." Such lack of taste! How can such crudity find place in a letter! My heart was revolted, disgusted.

Khat ! Khat ! Khas ! Khas ! Heavy military boots ring out on the cement courtyard. Three soldiers have appeared. They take over from the warder, examining the lock. They do not stop long in front of any cell nor make a fuss over their duty. I realise that none of the prisoners is asleep. Anyone who had fallen asleep would have been wakened by the warder. Every prisoner has to be called when the guards are changed to make sure that he is alive! If a prisoner is sitting beside the door, coughs or in some other way indicates that he is alive and well they do not disturb him. But if he is sleeping he is not spared. A cell prisoner! What need can he have for more than two hours sleep at a stretch? "This is the rule, Babu." Warders answer when asked the reason. How can they know whether anyone has lost his power of speech or fallen into a faint unless he is called? How else can the doctor be informed? To tell the truth the occupants of the cells are not too much inconvenienced by this rule. Men living in cells do not enjoy the unbroken sleep that comes with a normal working life for many reasons—bedbugs, ants, anxiety, enforced idleness.

From Cell No. 10 floats the line of a song: "Our martyrs' squad!"

The word squad reminds me of the *seva dal* training class in Patna Camp Jail in 1932. Nilu and I both decided to enroll ourselves. The very first day, when drill was over, Nilu asked me the meaning of the word squad. I explained that a number of soldiers together make a squad. A non-commissioned officer or N.C.O. is the commander. Nilu answered impatiently, "Tendulkar explained all that. What I want to know is why that word has been chosen for use in the *seva dal*. Couldn't they find any other? Squad! Squad!" With that he burst out laughing. He laughed and laughed. In the afternoon when Tendulkar snapped out his commands, "Stand at ease! Attention!" and so forth, using the Hindi terms, "*kadam khol*!" and "*sabdhan*!" Nilu burst out laughing in front of everybody. Tendulkar flamed with rage. After his training in Hardikar's camp at Hubli he had conducted several classes of his own in Bombay. At the express wish of the Provincial Congress Committee he had come all the way from Maharashtra to train *seva dals* in Bihar. He had a great deal of experience in working with volunteer groups but he had never seen such indiscipline during drill. He could not speak Hindi well His face flushed and his eyes reddened. "I'll cane you;", he cried and gave Nilu a jab with the stick he carried. Nilu snatched the stick away from him and cried, "Do your caning in Maharashtra! That sort of thing won't do here! You don't know how to speak the national language. You call Poona, Pune. And still you *will* talk Hindi!" Nilu had taken hold of Tendulkar by the arm. The others surrounded him quickly and made him let go. News of the incident spread throughout the prison instantly. There were nearly four and a half thousand prisoners in the jail. Wherever one went, in every ward, small groups formed to discuss the matter. Every corner of the jail, even the air and the sky, reverberated with it. At the central place we called the *chowk* or Square, several large groups were dividing up according to opinion. The warders were indistinguishable from the prisoners. They are as enthusiastic as anybody over jail politics. Some one made a speech and explained the situation. Bihar's good name was at stake. Tendulkar was an outsider. Had he been shown the courtesy due to guests? And to make fun of the national

language! The speaker added, with a confidential air, "He's a Bengali, you see." He smiled significantly, as though there was nothing more to be said. I hung my head in shame and hurt. They had not understood what Nilu had done. They interpreted his action in their own way, using their imagination. Their interpretation suited their purpose. I met Nilu in the evening, in the Ward, at supper. Meals are served before sundown. As we are not hungry so early we keep the bread and eat it later. Nilu brought up the subject himself and spared me the embarrassment. The incident had made me feel ashamed. But Nilu was not in the least put out. He kept on repeating, "What harm would it do to use English terms for drill? Would it in any way delay India's independence to say, "Quick march!" or "Stand at ease!" The fellow insists on speaking Hindi even though he doesn't know it. He has no manners. Ill-bred! Why should I be polite to him?" I have never given Nilu unsought advice. Nor would I have said anything that day if he had not brought up the subject himself. I told him briefly the interpretation the other prisoners had put on his action. Nilu was furious. "How can such people set the country free?" he cried. Then he went on talking to himself, saying a great many things. Some time later his anger vented itself on the unknown prisoner who had stolen his molasses. On Sundays prisoners who keep the holy day are given bread and molasses or a little fruit instead of rice. Nilu took molasses. The two of us shared my rice. And because we took this trouble we had a little molasses to eat the rest of the week. The molasses had been stolen. It's not surprising that Nilu should be bitter. But when Nilu shouted rude remarks about the other political prisoners in everybody's hearing I felt badly about it. Particularly when the atmosphere was agitated already and adverse to us. But once Nilu has made up his mind he will not change his course though the whole world may oppose him. No one can prevail upon him to change it. I'm always afraid Nilu will get himself into trouble. Political prisoners must have something to pass their time with when they are in jail. The energy which keeps them tirelessly at work outside the jail seeks satisfaction inside the jail through the formation of cliques, the holding of meetings and petty intrigue. But how were they to keep themselves interested without constantly

changing their programmes? The affair of Nilu did not go far for this reason. The next morning when breakfast was being served some one remarked that soaked gram had been given to us every day for a long time now. It would be nice to have flattened rice instead. That was enough. A doggerel was immediately forthcoming: "Flattened rice! Flattened rice! We want no more gram." It was taken up in chorus at once, everyone in the jail joining in. Glasses and plates were pounded to mark the rhythm. Some began to whistle. One ran his plate noisily across the bars of the door. It made a terrible racket. Many climbed up into the windows. Two scrambled from the windows up on to the iron roof. Suddenly, as though at the touch of a wand, everybody went mad. I saw people whom I knew to be dignified and grave unable to contain their excitement. Men were running from ward to ward, shouting crazily, "Blankets! Blankets!" The word was caught up and a new programme sprang into existence. Blankets were carried out and thrown together in a heap. A few tried to tear them to pieces. Somebody brought a live coal from the kitchen and threw it on them. They began to smoke, emitting a foul odour. Two men overturned the large iron cauldron in which the soaked gram was kept. The nearest warder was sounding the alarm, blowing his whistle without a break. Taking the signal from him, every warder in the jail, wherever he happened to be, took up his whistle and blew. It was like a competition between football referees and engine drivers. The shrill sharp blast of innumerable whistles being blown together gave the atmosphere of the jail an entirely new feeling. The gong in the tower began to clang steadily . . . dong, dong, dong. At the jail gate another gong echoed it. It was like the sinking of a ship in a novel. From the other direction came shouts. The blankets are burning! The blankets are burning! Plates were drumming. "Down with the wage slaves!" Other slogans were not distinctly audible. The jail staff left whatever they happened to be doing and came running at top speed, just as they were. A signboard appeared on the tower; "Wards No. 17, 18, 19." The warders from the gate, clubs in hand, advanced towards the tower. Many of them were barebodied, barefooted or half-dressed. The jail doctor, Haren Babu, arrived wearing only a undershirt. A warder was shouting from the tower:

"Seventeen! Eighteen! Nineteen!" repeating the words over and over. It was on those wards that the swelling crowd converged. "Soldiers are here." There was a sudden murmur. A group of men carrying rifles entered the jail gate. There was neither haste nor hesitation in their manner or their movements. They approached the tower at a quick march and then came to a halt in front of the gate that was common to the three disturbed wards. A pile of wood apples lay in a corner of the yard. The tree had been cut down the day before. The prisoners used to climb the tree and shout, *'Gandhiji ki jai!'* They had tied the national flag to the top. The flag could be seen from outside the jail, for a long distance. So the tree was felled. Four warders formed a ring around the wood apples in order to prevent the prisoners from using them to attack the warders when the clubbing started. Soldiers cordoned off the disturbed area. A group of warders, accompanied by several trustees, and other members of the jail staff, entered the wards. The beating up which followed immediately was of the kind officially described as mild. No distinction was made between the innocent and guilty. As usual the least troublesome, the most docile, got most of the blows. The warders made a curious noise with their mouths as they whirled their sticks. "Over there! Over there! One's getting away. Get the devil! Hit him!" They cried. And the convict overseers, the trustees, were not lacking in zeal. There was no escape for the prisoners who happened to be closest to where the jail officials were standing. As subordinates, the warders made a show of their efficiency in front of their superior officers. Some of the prisoners dropped to the ground. Blows on the head forced others to sit down. A guileless fellow from Darbhanga was telling his beads. He was not spared. The warders began to move in our direction. I felt quite nervous. I knew I was going to be beaten up and I also knew I would not be permitted to defend myself. I began to imagine what kind of blows I was going to get. A club, aimed at my head, descended. Unconsciously my arms went up to cover it. I realised what I had done when the club struck my arm. It had an iron swivel near the tip. The ring cut into my flesh. Two or three more clubs were coming my way. I had been forced into a sitting position. Nilu was holding to me. "Cover your head again!" he cried, "Cover your head!" Several of

the blows fell on Nilu. I was hit once. Nilu's head was bleeding. The warders went off in another direction. They had no time to waste in any one place. The atmosphere in the ward was portentous and muffled. Prisoners were lying on the ground. The lucky ones who were injured slightly brought water to the others. Some sprinkled it into the faces of their unconscious comrades. Others fanned an inert comrade with a newspaper or a towel. Those whose injuries were less severe gave themselves First Aid. If they waited for the attentions of the jail hospital they might have to wait until the next day. The few who had escaped entirely set out to inspect the damage and gauge its extent, like villagers after the passage of a heavy storm. Then the doctor and the apothecary came, bringing medicine. Stretchers were carried in. The seriously injured were removed to the hospital.

"Answer, Hospital!" The answer of the hospital guard can be heard distinctly from here. He has answered, without forming a word, inarticulately, and his voice is galling. He may have been asleep, waking suddenly to an awareness of his duty. No patient in the hospital is likely to sleep. Night after night passes like this for them. The calling of the warders keeps them awake. There is no one to look after them. The last Superintendent ruled that the guard need not answer at night. A Superintendent can, if he wishes, make some concessions to sick prisoners on medical grounds. A little air and light can be let into this huge machine of oppression through the small aperture 'medical grounds.' Sympathetic officials are able, with its help, to make things a little more comfortable and convenient. The present Superintendent has restored the old order. The guard has to answer. Are these sick men, so much in need of care and affection, not thinking of their wives and families as they lie in their beds? Being ill in prison makes one more homesick than ever. Ordinary prisoners do not always get two square meals a day outside. For them, whatever else prison may mean, two meals are assured. No uncertainty attaches to food. But what of that? When they are sick they feel completely helpless. Will these afflicted men, along with all their other worries, not think of me at least once tonight? With sympathy or at least with fear? They must surely be thinking of my execution with fear,

mustn't they? It is not of me as a person they think but of an unknown condemned man in Cell No. 1.

There is an open verandah on the upper storey of the hospital. Patients with T.B. are kept there. The scaffold can be seen plainly from it. Tonight it is illuminated by powerful lights. Sentrys are on guard. Some one may spend money, bribing the warders to put the apparatus out of order. Who knows? The T.B. patients are watching the lights. Are their hearts withering within them? They want to live too although they are dying by slow degrees. And they consider themselves luckier than a condemned man. I'll go accompanied by their unsought pity, their sighs. My execution will create temporary excitement and sadness in the prison. Nobody will even know when one of the T.B. patients dies. Their next of kin will receive an official postcard. The total numbers of deaths in the hospital will go up by one. The jail doctor may not even bother to get out of bed the night one of them dies. When he shouts his answer to the tower the warder on night duty will reduce by one the number of his prisoners. That's all. "A prisoner has been unconditionally released." He'll jokingly inform the warder in the tower, his rough voice cracking the tranquility of the night.

A train is whistling. I can hear it. Is it past midnight already? The train is pulling out of the station. The station is far away from here yet it seems to me that I can hear the bustle on the platform.

Travellers are hurrying here and there. "Coolie! Coolie!" "This side!" The stationmaster at Rautara used to call out, "Ba-ell! Ba-ell!" And the signaller would beat the gong.

This train whistle is a link between the open world, the wide world, and the circumscribed world of the prison. No Vaishnava poet ever dreamt of a flute more distracting, more enticing, than this whistle. "It pierces my heart through my ear!" Is a line which is not just a metrical arrangement of words any more to me today. What mysterious waves set the strings of my heart vibrating? The whistle of a jute mill in the morning creates a temporary stir in the hovels of the labourers it summons but the whistle of a train makes the heart of every prisoner beat faster, awakens many dormant memories, sweet memories, giving substance to his formless longings and hopes.

The sound of a train passing. It's going away. Very far away. Both sides of the track are dark. Nothing can be seen. The immense infinite makes itself felt in its limitlessness. No walls exclude it.

The letters O.T.R., Oudh Tirhut Railway must have been replaced by B.N.W.R., Bengal and North Western Railway, on all the carriages. Changes are taking place all the time everywhere and yet there are many things of which we can only think as fixed and permanent. I can never, for instance, think of my father without his moustache and beard. The mere idea makes me laugh. Rubbish! Is even that possible?

Any sound from the outside world, not only the sound of a train, is sweet to men shut up in prison. It may be just the barking of a dog in the staff quarters. The other day a group of boys passed down the road shouting, 'Hip! Hip! Hurray!' They were probably on their way home from a football match. How many memories they evoked! How long it has been since I saw children! Nilu, a boy of nine or ten, in short pants, Captain Nilu, carrying a porcelain cup and saucer, shouting at the top of his voice, 'Hip! Hip! Hurray!' Nilu's face was red with the heat and the exertion.

A train whistles at three in the afternoon and again at half-past midnight. A steamer whistles at five in the morning and again at six-thirty in the evening. They are my clock, more reliable even than the shadow in front of my cell which is the companion of all my fancies. Every now and then I hear the droning of a plane. One passes overhead every two hours throughout the night. Perhaps they carry mail to the Assam front. The sound does not stir any redolent memories. I feel nothing more than a momentary curiosity as to where the planes go every day, how they find their way in the dark, compass, map, the line of the railway, the Ganges ! When planes pass in large formations during the daytime the two bomb case accused in Cells No. 9 and No. 10 count them out loud. I can hear them from my cell, one, two, three, four. I do not know why the sound of an aeroplane evokes no response in me. Planes have no place in the world I knew. Their connection with the earth is slight. Even the birds I see in prison, crows, sparrows, pigeons, mynas, do no more than attract my attention now. They do not move me deeply. They relieve the monotony of

my life, bring a change, but they do not do more than that. The cloud-messenger of the love-lorn Yaksha, the swan-messenger of the lonesome Radha, are poetic fictions. They do not bear the stamp of real human experience.

The guard is nodding where he sits. The familiar cat approaches stealthily. It has stopped, startled. Perhaps it does not dare to come closer because I am sitting beside the door. It comes everyday to lick my plate. Once a week I am given a little curd. What does it find on other days? It has learned to be something of a vegetarian, living in prison. Sahadeo's dog liked vegetarian food too. It lived in the Ashram. Where is the dog now? Sahadeo's brother may have taken him home to the village. I can see the colour of the cat clearly in the light of the lantern. It has yellow, black and grey stripes like a tiger. It is handsome. It was sitting where it is now the day the Jailor came. He joked about it. "Are you making friends with the cat?" he asked, "What have you named it?" "No," I answered, "It comes of its own accord." "Then name him Togo." He laughed aloud at his joke. The Jailor's teeth are as white as teeth in a tooth paste advertisement, pearly!

I get up and move to the side, to make way for the cat. It miaows. The cat is not sure it can trust me. I give it a little curry from my plate. Will the cat eat it? It is made of gourd. I tossed it to the cat and the cat miaowed again and ran away. The curry hit the bars and is sticking to them. It did not get farther than the door.

Nilu and I were eating oranges, sitting on the bed in Mother's room in the Ashram. We were competing with each other to see if we could throw the skins through the window without hitting the bars How strange! Most of the skins did hit the bars. The window was not heavily barred and there was plenty of space between them. Yet every orange skin, with few exceptions, hit one.

Why do I keep on thinking about Nilu? Is it because of the thing I want to forget? My unconscious mind refuses to accept what I have been telling myself over and over again these last few days. I know that Nilu only did his duty when he gave evidence against me. No self-respecting, truthful political worker could have done otherwise. But this is a rationalisation. In my heart I know that what he did might look well enough

in a court, even perhaps on the printed page of a book, but it has no place anywhere else. Why else should the thought of Nilu keep coming back and back again? Did the way he made it possible for his only brother to be sent to the gallows in order to prove his loyalty to his party show the soundness of his heart or betray the aversion of a sick mind? The real I, deep down inside, cannot justify his conduct. And so I keep on trying to ease the agony of my burning with the sweetness of old memories.

I'm back in my old place in front of the door. This time I am resting my weight on my left side and grasp the bars with my left hand. I am not as much at ease this way nor does it seem as natural to me as using my right. I'm sitting in the depression on the floor. It's like sitting behind a mahout on a large elephant. What strange things I imagine! But why is that strange?

I was in the village of Dhanapat Jadar, the wealthy householder of Karahagolla. The police suspected him of having a gang of robbers in his pay and were on the point of starting a bad livelihood case against him. The Congress Ministry was in power. So he took us all to his village and arranged a meeting for us there. He wanted to intimidate the police inspector by making him think he was influential in the Congress. The meeting was held with a great deal of ostentation. After we had dined he invited us to go hunting, saying that he had made all the necessary preparations. The elephant on whose back I was perched made its way toward a jungle of thorn trees and low brush. I was sitting just behind the mahout. The elephant was an old one. The hollow behind its neck was large. I sat in it with my legs comfortably crossed. The jungle began. We had advanced some distance when I saw a large peepul tree in front of us. The elephant suddenly decided he was hungry. He lifted his trunk and tugged at a small leafy branch. I did not realise at the time what was happening. I felt as though I had been dropped into a mill and was being ground to pieces. When the elephant raised his head the hollow in which I was sitting contracted and the lower part of my body was compressed. I cried out in pain. The mahout understood and immediately made the elephant lower its trunk. I got off. My legs were numb.

The warder is leaning against the wall, asleep. He has taken his turban off and put it on the floor beside him. The warder of Cell No. 3 seems to be asleep too. The footsteps of the guard in charge of the ward as a whole can be heard. He is walking up and down outside. The cells are all quiet. Everybody seems to be asleep. Has even the insane fellow fallen asleep tonight? The bomb case accused may be reading by the light of their candle. I can hear crickets chirping. The chirping is not as animated as it used to be in the Ashram. When, as a child, I used to wake up in the cold of a winter night, the chirping of the crickets opened the doors of mystery for me. This chirping is not like that. Nilu used to say the sound is made by a species of ant. Who can argue with him ? The chirping of crickets is not in harmony with the atmosphere of a prison. This comfortable sound has no place behind these walls, in this routine, the roll calling, chains, rules. But can walls shut out things like crickets?

The new set of warders has entered. It is surely one o'clock. There must be three of them, one for my cell, one for Cell No. 3 and one for the ward in general. One has entered the yard in front of this cell. He has picked up the warder's turban and put it on one side. The sleeping warder is unaware of what he has done. Now the new warder calls him, "O Haidar, are you going to spend the night here?" Haidar scrambles to his feet in confusion. "The Jailor hasn't come, has he? Who is it? Kisun Chand? The new guard has come? Don't tease me, brother. Where's my turban?"

"How do I know?" answers the new guard, "Well, well! I've just come."

Haidar did not believe him at first. Then he paled with anxiety. His job is new. When he took up his duties one of the first things he was told was that when the Jailor, going his rounds, finds a warder asleep he does not say anything on the spot. He only takes his turban away. Later the offender is fined. Harekisun was caught only last week. He bribed the convict in charge of the wardrobe room, Birjabilash, to give him another turban for a rupee and a half. The next day, at parade, the Jailor asked him where he had got his new turban. Harekisun denied everything at first but he confessed when the Jailor began to question him closely. He ruined not only himself but

Birjabilash as well. Kisun related the story, ending it with a snap of his fingers and a grimace. Haidar has understood. He knows what he wants. To get his turban back he'll have to use more than flattery. The other two warders going off duty come up. They're standing in front of my cell. Haidar has his turban again. The other warders have conferred. It's agreed that Haidar will be put on duty tomorrow noon in the Upper Division Ward for political prisoners. He is to get a glass of milk for Kisun Chand from there. They go out laughing.

Even this work-weary life of theirs has its compensations—a secure income, wife and children.

I come home from a trip into the countryside. Saraswati is standing in the doorway. She is smiling, shyly. There is a line of vermillion in the parting of her hair and conch shell bracelets on her wrists. "Sit down and rest a little," she says, "While you cool off I'll make you a cup of tea." I follow her into the kitchen without answering, and sit down on a low stool, smiling. Her face is damp with perspiration and flushed with the effort of trying to light a wet piece of wood by blowing on it. Her hair has fallen over her face... It might have been!

But a harsh ideal has shaped my life How would it have helped me to want anything else? Always, always, people have always said, "A boy like Bilu is rare. One doesn't find many." The desire to deserve the praise bestowed upon me so liberally kept me from straying from the path of self-denial and self-restraint. How many wild desires have I not beaten into submission! But has it lifted me to a higher level? No. If it had there would be no uncertainty in my heart today. Why should visions of delight keep intruding upon my thoughts? I haven't been able to achieve anything at all. My name will not be inscribed upon history. The only thing I've succeeded in getting is the opportunity to take my place in the long line of martyred patriots, an endless serpentine queue like a queue of people buying tickets for a football match. Even my neighbours will forget all about me by next week. Who knows if they remember me now? What, then, have I spent my time doing? I'm not a superman. I am just an ordinary fellow made of flesh and blood, with all the weaknesses, faults and illusions of other men. Keats lived twenty-five years, Shelley thirty. Pitt became Prime Minister of England at the age of twenty-three. I'm going

to die ignominiously at thirty-three, like a dog or a cat. No one will know, nobody will hear about it, no one will shed even a hot tear or two. Everything that I have tried to do has been spoiled. Toil and trouble that misfires is wasted. Poets say nothing is wasted. that even a river that loses its way in a desert serves some purpose but such poets have not known frustration. They are romantics. It's all utterly meaningless.

No, there may be a meaning. What value can a life like mine have? Or several lives like mine? The things I've seen! Last August I saw the strength of the people in all its truth. I discovered how tremendous the dormant power is that sleeps beneath the hard crust of centuries. What can it not accomplish, once awakened? My contribution will not be negligible if I have helped to make people aware of their potential strength. The way of the political worker is hard, severely disciplined. The throne or the gallows! Prepare yourself for the noose and you may win the crown. It's a life of unending hardship. Your vitality is subject to a continuous strain, your enthusiasm worn down. If you expect or hope for anything more than your own satisfaction you'll be disappointed. Indifference and insult make life almost unbearable. Any step forward interferes with the vested interests of hundreds of people, every one of whom is turned into an enemy. For every person whose esteem you are able to win you'll find yourself the laughing stock and an object of scorn to ten. It's a relief to come to prison! Even a death sentence is a blessing, a blessing in disguise. How many people, innocent people, lose their lives in a war. They don't even know why. How many die of starvation, of disease, of malnutrition, lack of medicine! Their only offence is having been born, an event over which they have no control. Their suffering is a consequence of their birth. A death sentence, for a political worker, is an accident like being run over by a car or bitten by a snake, no more than that. He has to fight all the world outside his party. The reactionaries he has to fight are many and powerful! Every political worker has to be prepared. And inwardly? Inwardly the struggle is even harder. Conflicts between political parties, between individuals, between opposed interests, between provinces and between nations, make life intolerable enough. They're all part of the political game, a cruel, pitiless game. The weak have no place in it. Everybody

pushes to the front. No need is felt to look back to see what happened to those who dropped behind, whether they are dead or alive . . .

"Are the mosquitoes biting you, Babu?" the warder asked.

"Yes, why?"

"Why don't you rub a little kerosene on your arms and legs? I can't get mustard oil for you now."

"All right. Give me some."

Kerosene is better than mustard oil. The other day I rubbed some mustard oil on my legs before I went to sleep. When I woke up I was covered with ants, innumerable ants! Small red ants appear to like mustard oil. The warder has taken the paper stopper out of the lantern, torn a piece off and is dipping it into the oil. He puts a few drops at a time into the palm of my hand. I rub it into my skin. It is cool, like eau de cologne. Are there no mosquitoes in Digboi?

Major Gomes of the Patna Camp Jail made some kind of an emulsion with kerosene. There was not a single mosquito in the whole of that huge prison. Gomes was eccentric but he was efficient. He was tall and dark-skinned, a little crazy. He called himself an Indian. One day he said to a political prisoner from Gaya, "Young fellow, you're a *shala* and I'm a *shala*. I apologise to all *shalas*." He called everybody a young fellow, *jawan*.

"Heniyo! Heniyo, young fellows. Heniyo!" the trunks of great trees were rolled down the Dhamaha-Purnea road and piled high across it. Nearly a hundred people from Kabaiya village were there. They laughed and joked as they built the barricade higher and higher. Their enthusiasm was irrepressible, making the impossible suddenly possible. What had come over these poor peasants, people who had never found time to laugh in their lives before? Everyone had something to say. The events of the past few days had provided all of them with stories. Only hearers were lacking. There had been firing at Birgaon, forty-seven killed and uncounted wounded. The wife of the Police Sub-Inspector had declared that if her husband did not resign his job she wouldn't cook for him. The village Council of Five had fined Haraku, the barber, for shaving the *naib*. Haraku confessed in front of everybody. He said that when he saw that the *naib* was wearing a white Gandhi cap he

thought he had joined the nationalists. "Punish me in any way you like," he said "Only don't cut off my fingers." A platoon of Tommies was on a steamer in the middle of the Kosi river. They hadn't the courage to spend the night on the shore. How many other stories! The barricade rose higher. No military lorries would be able to pass. Then they remembered the big banyan beside the road near Rahuwa. "Let's go! Let's go!" They took whatever they could find, axes, spades, sickles, bill-hooks. They went, not at a quick march, but at a lively run. No one stopped, however tired he might be. Hareswar was carrying a national flag. He was fresh from training in a *seva dal*. He had not been home more than a month. The District Congress Committee had organised a camp to train people in the defence of their villages. Hareswar was much respected in the village now. He had been displaying his newly acquired jiu-jutsu grips, his dexterity with a singlestick and his cycle-riding. He began to sing: "Forward, jawans, forward!"

Old and young took up the refrain, panting for breath as they pressed on Rahuwa. The people of Rahuwa came out and joined them. The work was finished in two hours. Again the cry was raised: "Let's go. Forward!" They advanced towards the railway station at Krityanandanagar. Barricading roads no longer satisfied them. It was too mild when police stations had been set on fire. Together, the people of Rahuwa and Kaboiya made a formidable group. They were like people possessed or intoxicated. They refused to let me get off my cycle, insisting on pushing it along with me on it. Was it possible to ride a cycle through such a crowd? Nobody listened. "Victory to Gandhiji!" Mud was ahead. "It doesn't matter. Victory to India!" The cycle could go through it. "Fresh news from Bombay." News kept coming in. A student from Rahuwa took a lithographed paper out of his pocket and read it out as though he were reciting. Across the top of the paper in large letters was printed, "The Call of the Country." Jinnah had been arrested. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit had been fired upon. A free government had been set up in the district of Monghyr. Other exciting events were reported. The people lacked the judgement that day to distinguish between the possible and the impossible. How could they be expected to have it? So many unbelievable things had happened during the last few days. They did not dare to

disbelieve anything any more. Heated discussions were taking place as to who was to be their leader on the day they would take over the headquarters of the district. Was Tilakdhari Singh of Rahuwa or Hareswar of Kaboiya the better man? Hareswar had *seva dal* training, it was true, but he did not yet have a moustache. The Kaboiya people considered him still a baby. Tilakdhari had been with them since '32. He had gone to jail in that year. They asked me to arbitrate.

An old woman was standing on the road outside Rahuwa. A few half-naked boys and girls stood beside her. I was told she was the mother of Badar Bahargamiya, a cobbler by caste. Custom does not permit cobblers to live in the village itself so they are called Bahargamiyas, Outsiders. One of the children was holding a garland of marigolds The old woman and the children sang out in unison, "Pranam!" The old woman spoke diffidently, addressing herself to me. 'We are poor and have no means of showing you our esteem What can we do? We live in peace and comfort because of the well you had built for us. Sand has been accumulating in it for the past two years." Evidently she was fond of talking. I remembered the well. It was dug during the earthquake relief work. Birinchi, a Congress volunteer, took a five rupee bribe from Makasudan Singh and promised to have the well built on his land. I discovered it on a tour of inspection and ordered the well to be dug near the cobbler's cottage, beside the Dhamdaha-Purnea road.

"Give me a jug of water to drink, Mother, cold and fresh! Let me taste the water of your well for myself."

The request was totally unexpected. The old woman was thrown into confusion. She seemed, from her expression, more frightened than honoured. She looked questioningly at the people from the village who were present in the crowd. Was the Master Saheb's son going to drink water from her well? No one from the village did. What was he asking? Was she to give him water? The heavens were tumbling about her ears. Tilokdhari Singh said encouragingly, "Rinse the jug out first. Then fill it with water and bring it to him. Bilu Babu has asked for a drink of water." The water was brought. Badar's wife, swathed in a long veil, gave me a piece of hard molasses to eat as I drank. The molasses were very stale and coated with dust. Evidently they had treasured it a long time. I broke it

into small pieces and gave a little to each of the children, overcoming their shy protests. A small quantity was enough for me. Badar's mother watched me intently, staring. The expression in her eyes was the same as the expression in my Mother's eyes when she sits down to fan me while I eat. The same look comes over the face of everyone who serves me food, Mother's, Aunt Jathaima's, Nadidi's, Saraswati's, the mother of Sahadeo, the wife of Dubeyji. "Victory to Gandhiji !" the shout rose around me. "Mother of Badar," cried Hareswar, "Give me a drink too!" Water was brought in a bucket. Everybody struggled to get a drink of the water drawn by an untouchable. What gave them the courage to do such a thing here, in their own village, in front of their own people? There was bravado in their faces. The cheering was incessant. "Victory to Gandhiji! Victory to Mahatmaji!" Each was anxious to prove to me how highminded he was. Did we have time to keep on standing there? "Push forward, jawans! Forward." The corners of the old woman's eyes glistened with her over-flowing gratitude. It was her tribute to the generosity of the village people. Mahatmaji was her guru, a god more efficacious than any icon. Or so she must have thought. When Gandhiji came to this part of the country, after the earthquake, his car passed down this road. There had been so many people in it she could not make out which was the Mahatma. The only person she recognised was the Master Saheb. Badar told her that a radiance emanated from Gandhiji's person. She folded her hands and raised them to her forehead in reverent greeting, turning in his direction.

The crowd was again in motion. It was surging forward. Why should it look back? Many women like Badar's mother were lifting their hands to their foreheads in the same way. Where was the time for people to stand and watch? There was so much to be done! Did they not carry a great responsibility? "Victory to Bilu Babu!" "Victory!" "A slogan has come from Bombay," somebody cried. The others demanded, "What is it?" They repeated it slowly, group by group, *"Inquilab Zindabad!"* The teacher from the Upper Primary School at Kaboiya raised his arms and danced while he cheered, like people do during kirtan parties. His voice was hoarse. The only sound he succeeded in producing resembled an asthmatic cough. His enthusiasm was

unlimited however and he made no effort to retain his dignity in the presence of his students. A man on horseback rode up and greeted me, getting off his horse. From him I learned that my brother had come to Krityanandanagar, to the warehouse of the merchant, Harakh Chand. He had come to inquire into the price of kerosene. The man said nothing more to me but he talked in a low voice to several of the people standing near me. The crowd seemed to want to hush up what was said. Nilu was the Secretary of the People's Price Control Committee. I made out that the purpose of his visit was to inspect the stocks of kerosene or something. Perhaps he had passed a remark condemning the barricading of the roads by the Krityanandanagar people, or against the tearing up of railway tracks and the cutting of telegraph wires. The vast crowd flowed forward. It did not move like our primitive ancestors who came out in search of food with aching hearts and uncertain objectives. These people strode forward boldly, excited by the prospect of a new world. Their goal was definite. The schoolmaster of Kaboiva could not be adequately described as just a member of the species *homo sapiens* nor could his enthusiasm be attributed to biological necessity. The rail line. Krityanandanagar could be seen in the distance. Within half an half nearly a quarter mile of track disappeared without trace. The sleepers and the iron rails were borne on the shoulders of the crowd and thrown into the water beside the embankment or into the fields of maize that lay nearby. Two elderly gentlemen from Krityanandanagar came to try to persuade the crowd to stop its destructive activity. The crowd turned them away with scorn and laughter. Somebody twisted reeds into bracelets. Harish Chand forced the bracelets on to their wrists. "Go and sit at home with your jewellery like the women you are!" They were told. "Oh my goodness!" cried somebody, "How soft their hands are!" "Here's another pair of bracelets for your Nilu Babu. Tell him that he need not come here to put on airs with the Collector Saheb's money!" The people of Krityanandanagar know how to deal with a spy. If he has forgotten remind him what happened to the indigo planter, Wilson." The crowd had lost all restraint. They no longer felt any hesitation in passing remarks about Nilu in front of me. The wooden railway bridge was burning. How did the heavy

beams catch fire so quickly? Mother has difficulty in lighting a stove. A boy from Rahuwa was wearing a red undershirt. He was burlesqueing the clergyman whose house they surrounded yesterday. The tone in which the fellow shouted "Victory to Gandhiji!" amused them exceedingly. The rumbling of a train was heard. An engine came into view. It was almost upon us. The carriage was full of soldiers and the railway engineer was with them. Run! Run! Scatter wherever you can! Through the ditches, the shallow pools, through the fields! The crowd dispersed almost instantly. Tommy guns rattled harshly. I was in a field of maize on the Krityanandanagar side. I avoided the village. Why should I go there when the villagers were unsympathetic? In my haste I left the cycle on the railway line. The clergyman's beard was just like the tassle on an ear of maize. The stalks were full of ripening ears. The smell of the field was damp and sweet. The odour of gunpowder did not reach there.

During the subsequent trial the public prosecutor jokingly described the maize fields, saying that when the Tommies saw them they declared it was Nazi, not Indian, corn. Even the judge forgot himself and laughed at that. The clerk laughed too. And my lawyer Haren Babu, joined them. Artificial stalks of maize were kept in the sun temples of Chili and Peru. The stalk itself and the leaves were made of silver and the grains of the corn were gold . . .

My eyelids droop heavily. I'm sleepy. Let me stretch my arms and legs a little. Ah! I ache all over from sitting still. I yawn. Am I really going to sleep today too? How many stories I've heard about condemned prisoners! The hair of some is said to turn white in a night. My hair hasn't, has it? If there were a mirror I could see. Comrade Chunarballi went out of his mind. And I am sleepy. Strange!

If I had a lot of money I would make a will today. Hundreds and thousands of rupees. Marxist propaganda could be carried on with it! Groups of boys and young men could be organised in every village as they have been organised in Russia. But where is the money to come from? If only money could be won in a raffle without buying a ticket! And if the state were to come into our hands I could work and show people what can be done for the country, given ten years' time! When Congress

workers are out of prison again they'll certainly set up some institution in my memory. Bilu Ashram or Bilu Smarak. But they may not use my nickname. Purna Ashram will be the designation chosen. But nobody knows my proper name is Purna. Everyone knows me as Bilu Babu. Other things may happen later. The name of Purnea may be changed to Purna Nagar, like Stalingrad or the city of Gorky. At the crossroads in the marketplace, near the Balmukundu Saur Dharmsala, there will be a marble statue of me, in the pose of a speaker. And every year on this day people will gather at the base of the monumental statue to pay their respects to my memory. There is a green flame inside the lids of my eyes, a flame with markings like a peacock's tail, restless and vibrant. The flame is red now - yellow green - greenish blue - blue—black. Is it there or isn't it? Blackness.

Aunt Jathaima was sitting on the porch of her kitchen slicing mangoes with a big curved knife. A bowl was in front of her and a basket of fruit at her side. There was water in the bowl. She dropped the sliced fruit into it. Saraswati and I were seated on low stools facing her. "Bring a plate and I'll give you some together," she said to Saraswati. Saraswati answered, "Give it all to him. What'll he do with a slice?" Aunt Jathaima laughed and teased her, "Already? So far?" She handed me a whole mango, yellow gold, with a spot of red near the stem. I made an incision at the lower end and squeezed it until the pulp was soft enough to be sucked out.

Mother was sitting on the verandah outside her bedroom. She wanted to go to the bathroom but she could not. Midway, in the centre of the yard, was a great snake, black and smooth and shiny. It was standing still, its hood spread. Mother was calling, "Nilu, quick, kill it. At once." Father protested, saying, "No, don't kill it. Clap your hands and it will go away." Nilu paid no attention to Father. He snatched up a stick and advanced towards the snake. It turned and fled, disappearing into the dark well. The snake was not there any more. It had turned into the rope tied to the bucket. Nilu, in his anger, struck the bucket. It made a ringing sound.

The sound of boots near my head roused me. Ah! Have they come for me then? They'll open the door and enter now. I'm perspiring. I stand motionless, pulseless. The door has not

opened. No. Has a new warder come on duty? I sigh with relief. Yes. That's it. How long did I sleep? Is this the morning shift? Birds have not yet begun to stir. Shall I ask the warder what time it is? No, there's no need to do that. I shall know when it's time. He'll think I'm weakening if I ask. I cannot grovel to a warder during these, the last hours of my life. The insane man begins to rave very early. The morning is still a long way off. I still have two hours to live! I didn't make much of life outside, when I had the opportunity. I don't even remember how I've passed these thirty-three years, long years. Innumerable forgotten things lie in the sub-stratum of my lifetime, buried, a skeleton of memory here, a bone there. No one knows of them but me. I want to live. I should like to crowd everything there is to enjoy into these last two hours of my life, wringing out the world, living in a dream of happiness. If, at the last minute, the order for my execution is stayed! It can happen! It has happened to others - so many others. A horseman gallops up as the executioner lifts his sword. "Stop! Do not kill him, Executioner. Traitor. Stop!" I've read so many stories like that. Pythias and Damon.

If an earthquake as terrible as the one in '34 were to occur at this moment, if the walls of the prison were to collapse, I would still not be able to live. If the person is to hang me were to be taken with a sudden sickness? Somebody else will be found quickly enough. What if a letter staying my execution has come and is lying unopened? There is nothing surprising in such a thing happening. It did happen several years ago in the Punjab. The letter was in the Superintendent's pocket. It was remembered after the execution had taken place. Where is desire for life leading me? I've never believed in the infallible working of a blind fate. Is this, in truth, fear of death? Fear certainly. The effect the sound of boots had on me just now—what else was that but fear? Extreme anxiety breeds despair. It's despair that is working on me now.

The rope. It's made of heavy twisted cord. We used to call cord kite line as children. There's a noose in it. At the knot of the noose is a brass knob. The rope is greased the whole of its length. Beneath it is a dark hole like a well to look into. How deep is it? Not very, perhaps. The hole must be there so that the body can swing when the trap door opens. The feet

must not find a hold . . . The hole need not be very deep. Four or five cubits is enough. To dig much deeper would be to strike water . . . but the deeper the hole and the longer the rope the stronger will be the jerk when the body drops. This jerk is the real thing. Without it how can the vertebra at the back of the neck be broken? Death by hanging does not mean death by strangulation. If it did the compression of the wind-pipe would be enough. What would be the need of such elaborate machinery and so much ceremony? Hanging has been chosen as an easy and quick method of carrying out the death sentence. A hard knock on the back of the neck by the brass knob, a cracking and then? Stillness. No, how can there be absolute stillness? The life urge is so strong! Won't the limp, helpless body react to an urge so strong? There is reflex action even if the urge is cut off. I've watched a goat's body twitch after sacrificial decapitation. The body of a hanged man swings in emptiness, turning this way and that. The rope is loosened. The feet touch the bottom of the hole. Does the doctor cut the tendons in the legs? I remember hearing a story about a man who revived. That's why this precaution is taken. Nonsense! The doctor does not have to do anything of the kind. His presence is necessary at the time of execution only because of official regulations All he has to do is to say, yes, the prisoner is really dead. In legal terminology the prisoner is to be hanged by the neck until he is dead. That's the reason. Then somebody will go down the steps inside the hole, a hole like a miniature version of a Moghul cistern. He is a person of some importance. How many earn five rupees and a remission of their sentences in such a short space of time, for as little physical exertion? Genuine piece work! The body– no, it is no longer a body the corpse is brought up. The face is horrible! The eyes protrude. A blanket is thrown over it. What agony comes with the opening of the trap door! Sharp, impossible pain. My eyes are wet! Shame. It doesn't last long. One may not even feel it. Other thoughts may so occupy a man's mind he is not aware of it. Terribly wounded men carry on with their duties during a battle almost mechanically. Do they have any time to think of their own pain? And what does it matter if the pain is sharp, impossibly sharp? A moment's pain should not bother a person who has no hope of survival. I've heard

that, at the moment of passing, a man reviews his whole life. It passes before him like a cinema. I don't believe it. What if I had been sentenced in a country where the death penalty has been abolished? A life sentence would have cut me off from the bewildering beauty of the earth. But even a prison is part of the world. Winter comes to a prison and so does the spring, the summer, the monsoon. All the seasons can be felt and known. The sky, the wind, the sun, the moon and stars do not withold their sweetness from this place. The intemperance of a summer Northwester, the fragrance of the earth after the first shower, the intoxication of the soft rhythmic singing of the rain in the stillness of the night, the gold-plated sunshine of autumn which is replete with so many memories, the mysterious mists of early winter! The passage of all these through prison walls is unobstructed. And above all one can see human faces. What if they are the faces of thieves and robbers! They are men. Isn't it better to live among them than to dangle at the end of a rope? In America I would have taken my seat in an electric chair and all would have been over instantaneously. Painlessly. But the mental suffering which precedes death is the same there as here. Their method may be a little more civilised, that is all. What of countries where men are shot, cut down with a sword or guillotined? Our method is better than theirs. The very thought of having my neck severed by a sword makes me shudder. What harm would it do the government to give a condemned man a morphia injection or to chloroform him before his execution? The poor fellow would be spared both physical and mental suffering. If the purpose of the state is to remove the man from society it can execute him after he has been made unconscious. Best of all is potassium cyanide. It's all over in a second.

Nilu brought some home from the college laboratory. We discussed the advantages of using it at length and made our plans. The best way, we decided, is to fill a small rubber capsule and put it in the cheek. Then we would no longer be afraid of being arrested. We could, whenever necessary, bite down on the rubber capsule. If I had done that the day I tried to, my suffering today would have been spared me. But I didn't really believe then that I would ever need it. I would have bitten down on a capsule a little while ago when the sound of boots

woke me if I had had one with me. How surprised they would be to find me dead when they opened the door! The hangman would be disappointed. For the Superintendent it would be a botheration. A departmental explanation would be demanded of him. They'd all think that I'd died of heart failure, out of fear. No, surely there would be a post mortem. In that case they would come to know about the potassium cyanide.

It's not so easy to take potassium cyanide. I couldn't do it the day I tried. I was sick with gastric trouble and used to spend my afternoons watching football games. One day I saw Jiten call out to the Sub-divisional Office. "Come over here, Ismael," he said. They stood up in their car to watch the game, side by side, their arms around each other's shoulders. A sudden feeling of desperation seized me. My own insignificance, my weakness, my dullness, jabbed at my heart. Why am I not as bright as Jiten? I did not envy him nor was I particularly anxious to be friends with the Sub-Divisional Officer. Yet a great sadness welled within me, filling me. Within minutes I developed a deep distaste for life. What was the use of living? Death was preferable to the kind of life I was leading. The circumstances in which I seemed destined to pass my days seemed degrading. I made up my mind to take potassium cyanide that night. As the night deepened I counted the hours as they struck on the big clock of the Congress Office. When the final moment came it seemed to me I should wait. A childish desire to eat afternoon tea biscuits overcame me. I decided to consider suicide the following day, after satisfying my strange craving. The next day I felt differently. The whole affair seemed very amusing to me afterwards. I've laughed about it ever since. But I would certainly take cyanide today if I had any. This is not voluntary, not suicide. Cyanide is a good way of escaping a danger that is otherwise inescapable. I buried the phial at the base of the lemon tree, wrapping it in an old brown sock. It must still be there.

Several of the lower branches of the lemon tree were kept covered with earth, in order to grow grafts. Most of the Congress workers who visited the Ashram took one or two grafts. Nilu has to have a slice of lemon with his rice everyday. He does not like lentil soup without a few drops of lemon juice added. No fish is cooked in the ashram. Whenever she was

able to get a moderately big fish Aunt Jathaima used to invite us to her house. Nilu always took a lemon along in his pocket. What if Aunt Jathaima didn't have any? Even the youngest child in the house knew it. One of the children would search his pockets while another ran to tell Aunt Jathaima. She came out of the kitchen and cried, "Oh, so here you are, you eater of fish!" Once we were having lunch with her. Low wooden stools were placed in a row along the veranda. Before each stool a platter of rice was set. Nilu, Jiten, Ghanta and I were on the point of sitting down. "Come on," Nilu called, "Come on, you eaters of fish!" He made a dash for his stool. It slipped. His platter of rice was flung to one side. Confusion reigned. Aunt Jathaima has called him the Eater of Fish ever since, with affectionate mockery. The mockery has been lost but its appropriateness remains. "Where's your lemon?" she always asks, "Let me slice it for you. Now come on and give it to me, you Brahmin's son."

Nilu, the same Nilu, little Captain Nilu, Nilu in short pants, Nilu the Eater of Fish, the Nilu who worshipped his elder brother—Nilu has done this to me! I never expected it from him. How deplorably his feeling for me has changed! Shame! What am I doing? Have I struck this wound, a wound I avoid touching because it pains so much, which I cover carefully in the street, in the market-place, at the bathing ghat, in the crowds? I've hit it carelessly, sitting comfortably at home with my feet on the table. It cannot be hidden any longer, not by the salve of oblivion or any balm of logic. It has cut too deep into my heart. No. How can others be expected to understand Nilu if I don't? When, in the old days, jackals made depredations in a village, the marauder was caught and hung at the cross-roads. It was the custom to do so. People thought only of the loss they had suffered and took their revenge accordingly. But I must see things as Nilu sees them. Nilu sat down on this blanket beside me the other day when he came to see me. He could not look at me in the eye. There was guilt in his expression and his manner. Why? There is something wrong somewhere. What other reason could there be for his diffidence? Was it remorse? Does his conscience prick him? Nilu wanted to say something. I knew it but I did not give him the opportunity. My own self-control might have broken down. Nilu came to

see his elder brother, not the leader of a rival political party. How lucky it was that my inner conflict did not betray itself to him that day! Tears come to my eyes so easily. I was afraid. The interview passed off safely. And I did not break down after he left. He, on his part, showed signs of giving way. He pressed my hand in both of his as he went away. Only for a second. His hands were clammy and cold. I can still feel their trembling. I told him to go to see Mother. Who knows whether he did or not? It is for her that I am worried. She has a son left though. I shut my eyes and try to see Mother's face.

Mother was eating olive chutney with her rice. Her hair, in front, is streaked with white. But black still predominates. She has widened the parting of her hair by plucking out new growth. A broad line of red is painted in the part. The red border of her homespun sari lies across her head just behind it. Her neck is bare and there are no rings in her ears. There are lines in the corners of her half-closed eyes, one heavy line and others as fine as hairs. Two deep wrinkles run from the sides of her nose to her mouth The lines look deep because her complexion is fair. Mother pursed her lips as she sucked the chutney. There was a gentle movement in her throat. She clicked her tongue against the roof of her mouth. When her lips are parted one can see that she has no lower teeth. One can see her tongue in the cavity. "Get up, you two, get up!" she said but we stayed where we were.

Aunt Jathaima also has some of her lower teeth missing. How can she keep her teeth? A lump of tobacco mixed with lime is in her mouth the whole of the twenty-four hours, pushed up behind them. Tobacco is frequently added to betelnut but I've never seen anyone take so much tobacco habitually. What is Aunt Jathaima doing now? Will she sleep tonight? She is up at three o'clock always, summer and winter. She sits cross-legged on her bed and tells her beads. When she wakes she turns the flame of the lantern higher and sets it on the window sill. The light falls upon a picture of Radha and Krishna which is on the wall. She puts on her spectacles, seats herself and gazes at the picture with quiet concentration. This is in accordance with her guru's instructions. Her face is round. Mother once said it was like a round tin box. Smallpox has left a few scars. There is a blue tatoo mark on her forehead. A string of

sacred basil beads hangs around her neck. She pauses now and then as she tells her beads to spit tobacco juice out of the window. And she takes the opportunity to look at the sky to see how long it will be before the light comes. A bucket rattles down into the well. The neighbourhood grocer, Ramdev Sao, comes to draw water everyday before sunrise. He's Aunt Jathaima's clock. "Beli, O Beli, aren't you going to get up this morning?" Nadidi sits up in confusion and gets out of bed.

When Nilu was small I used to push and pull him in the morning to make him get up. "This isn't going to be good for you, Dada," he would say, turn over and go back to sleep. After another push he'd say, "Again!" Another pull and he would cry, "Still at it?" His voice would be louder. Then he would get up, complaining. "Here you go starting the day with your snake-charming spells!" Mother would exclaim. I'm trying to visualise Nilu's face but it won't come. Now that I want to see him for a last time, as a kind of consolation, his face does not come. At other times it comes easily without any effort on my part. Why can't I see it now? I try to remember his features--but the face I see is the face of Ganouri Mahato—the shaven head, snub nose, bull-dog expression. There is a gold ring in the upper part of one ear.

I feel cold. There is a chill in the morning breeze. The cell is really cool only for these last two hours before sunrise. The insane fellow has started his raving. The man in No. 3 is singing his hymns. I didn't notice when he started.

The crows in the peepul cawed once and are quiet again. Perhaps they have realised their mistake and that it is not yet dawn. They cawed too soon. How little time is left me! How precious every second is! In a film they would show an hour-glass now, an hour-glass like a double-headed drum, with the sand running out. The sand in the top is almost gone. One by one the grains slip through to the bottom. They do not stop. Or a lamp might be shown, a lamp burning more and more dimly as the oil runs out. Or perhaps the hands of a clock moving relentlessly to the destined hour. My clock follows its own course too, in a set progression—the chill breeze, the insane raving, the hymn-singing. All that remains is for the sky to clear a little. I can see the morning star. Above all there is the stern reality of my guard, dozing where he sits on the edge

of the cistern in the yard.

Bilu still exists, he is . . . in a little while he will not be. No flesh and blood Bilu, full of pleasures and sorrows. He'll be only a number in official statistics. What does the addition or subtraction of one matter in figures that are so high? Mathematicians allow one in a hundred for instrumental error oversight, deviation, etc. In business there is something called marginal fluctuation. Shall I fall within its scope? Perhaps when the Government of India balances its ledgers I, prisoner No. 1109, in Purnea Jail, condemned to the gallows, will increase the percentage of people hung by a decimal fraction. At the expense of a little printing ink in the official report! That will be the price of my life--Bilu Babu's contribution to the life of the nation.

A creaking sound like the creaking of an ox cart. It may be the sound of a door. The ward door. Then this is it? It is. As I thought. The tramp of many boots together on the cement courtyard. How many people are coming? The vibration from the tramping feet of a group of soldiers can, I've heard, break a bridge. The sound is really very loud. My heart pounds in step. I can hear it distinctly. Not even a drummer as expert as Rashamani every raised such a tumult on the night of Nabami! My whole body is shaking. My breath is coming hard. There is a film over my eyes. My head feels cold and hollow. Once my finger, the finger of my right hand, was caught in the spokes of a cycle wheel and cut. The blood would not stop flowing. The sight of the blood produced a sensation in my head like this. My forehead and nose are covered with perspiration. I take hold of the bars and try to pull myself up. My hands and knees are shaking terribly. I don't know why I want to stand up. I can't stand. My legs are paralysed. They felt like this when I tried to stand up for the first time after I had typhoid. The warder gets up and adjusts his turban. The insane man is raving. No. 3 is singing his hymns. The sound of boots comes closer, closer, closer. The lower part of my abdomen is empty, strangely empty. There's an icy sensation in my stomach. When a ferris wheel I rode at a carhival swung down I felt the same way. My tongue is as dry and rough as a file. It seems to be going down my throat.

Saraswati! Mother! Aunt Jathaima! Nilu, Nilu, what have

you done? My senseless body is swinging from an horizontal iron bar. The feet turn in space, north, north-east, east, south-east, south.

What's this? The boots aren't coming my way. My warder too is peering into the courtyard. The hymn-singing stops abruptly. Has my anxiety made me lose my hearing? No. A sound like a groan, a fumbled effort to speak. A most pitiful, helpless, hurt cry!

Who is it? Why?

Now then. Not only the sound of the boots. The cry comes again, a cry to rend the heart of the overcast sky, the ugly wildness of a storm! Mount Everest is crumbling. "Careful." The earth opens beneath my feet, down, down, into bottomless blackness.

"Light in Front." The shadows of monstrous ghosts slowly diminish and are lost in the light of the lantern. The lanterns are coming this way. A thousand stars and planets are hurtling out of their courses and rushing towards me! Every pore of my body awaits the terror, a typhoon lashes at every nerve. My agitation pounds against my eyes, trying to burst my eyeballs. I can't stand any longer. The violence of it is too much. I clutch the bars as strongly as I can.

UPPER DIVISION WARD

(FATHER)

"On the horizons of our nation our flag shines like a light.
Bow to the flag! Bow!"

The evening prayers are over. The warder is about to lock the door. He is grumbling. The only one who listens to him is the warder standing beside him. "They're all over the place," he complains, "While I call one in another goes out. Somebody's sure to stay in the latrine. Somebody else'll be praying. One asks to be allowed to finish a game of cards and another says wait a minute. Fudon Babu is never done pacing up and down. He can see I'm waiting to close the door but he makes no move to enter. If he's got to walk about so much to digest his food he might eat a little less. I can guess how much he got to eat at home. Does he have to eat so much there's no room in his stomach for water and air just because he's in the Upper Division?"

Meher Chand knows the tune of the national song. We follow his lead, joining in on the chorus. The national song is called the 'prayer' song here. We dim our lanterns before prayers. Meher Chand forgets the same line everyday. He turns the wick up and takes the Ashram Song Book out of his pocket. He has been singing the song for a long time now and he should have the whole of it by heart. It won't be long before he's set free. Many of the others know the line but they like to see the fun. Meher Chand does not realise that when he comes to the line and stretches his hand out towards the lantern the room fills with suppressed merriment. I tried to help him remember it the other day. He did not like it so I did not say anything.

The present arrangement is a good one. Our prayers and hymns are over by lock-up time. We used to hold our prayers after the door was closed but I noticed that many members of the Socialist Party objected. Two of them, Balaram Deo and and Siupujan, took turns singing secular songs loudly, all out of tune, during our service. I had not realised before the extent to which our prayers annoy them. The next day I persuaded the others to change the time in order to finish our hymns

before lock-up. Meher Chand and Sadasiu refused at first, "Why should we humble ourselves?" They said, "They blow the smoke of their cigarettes into our faces till midnight and Lachhmikanta's lecturing to his Marx class prevents us from sleeping. We don't object, do we?" They added, "Don't ask us to do this, Master Saheb. We can make them calm down without much trouble." I explained and explained. "Why should we do anything that causes them such real inconvenience?" I argued, "Let them do as they like. Why should we in any way neglect our duty? They're young. Mere children! You have taken as your ideal the path that Gandhiji has shown us. It's much nobler than theirs. Why should you depart from it?" After this and a great deal more they agreed reluctantly. From then on we have finished our prayers before lock-up time. These are school and college students, mere boys. The other day during a game of volley ball I saw Comrade Madhoram sit on the chest of Comrade Murali Misir and take him by the throat. They quarrel with the kitchen manager over the food every day. Quarrels are frequent and they often stop speaking to one another. Why should we judge such childishness? We haven't mastered the passions of our hearts yet although we have lived three-fourths of our lives out. And these are boys! We should not have chosen this way of life if what they do disturbs us so much. Bilu is one of them. Each of them is like Bilu to me.

If only I could have spent this night with Bilu! No. It's better not to be together Both of us might break down—but we would have been able to talk up to the end. Would we have found anything to say? The boys have never spoken to me about anything but the absolutely necessary. In my presence Bilu shrinks into himself. He is constrained. He has never been forward and prefers to keep to himself. My teaching is responsible. The boys have grown up the way I've trained them. But why has Nilu turned out the way he has? Bilu may have developed an inferiority complex because I did not send him to an English college. Nilu went to college. That may be the reason he has so much confidence. I don't know how the boys behave with other people but I'm responsible for the distance between them and me. I've never opened myself out to them. I never played with them when they were babies, taking them

into my lap or carrying them on my back. I had an idea that it would be difficult to control them if I were too free in my manner. To indulge them would be to spoil them. It was better, I thought, to keep my distance so that they might regard me with a certain awe. I never took anybody's advice about this. I was a school teacher. Perhaps that was the reason, perhaps it was a matter of habit, or there may have been some other reason. Relationships have always tended to seem to me to be teacher-student relationships. Even in the political field I think of the leader as the guru and his followers as pupils. I have never been anyone's comrade. When Jiten was little he was with his father day and night. The plump smiling child carried his father's big cane, walking in front of him everywhere, to the market, to the shops and to feasts as well. He accompanied his father to our evening gatherings and made friends with all of us, even me. Bilu's mother noticed the difference in my manner with him and any manner with my own children. I used to fondle him and play with him, carrying lozenges in my pocket for him. She is a woman of few words. Yet one day she could not but speak of it. "Pay some attention to your own children," she pleaded. I laughed my discomfiture away. But if I had been less distant with them when they were small my relationship with my sons would not be what it is today, too distant and frigid. It would have been affectionate and warm. Nilu and Bilu always turned to their mother for affection. It was to her they took their childish cares. They still share their meals, sit and talk together as intimately as they did when the boys were small. Whenever I think of the boys by name Nilu's name comes first, Nilu and Bilu. Bilu is the eldest but his name does not come first. Just like Ganesh and Kartik! The name of Ganesh always comes first, at the beginning of any undertaking. But try to say Ganesh first and Kartik afterwards. The two words just do not come that way

Sadasiu has come to let my mosquito net down. Perhaps he thinks I want to tell my beads. It's not possible to concentrate on anything outside the mosquito net. The mosquitoes are very trying. Their bites distract my attention. I don't use a net when I sleep. The body grows accustomed to as much as it is habituated to endure. If we can't put up with the bites of mos-

quitoes, if we haven't enough hardihood, can we ever be equal to the achievement of great things? Not to have a mosquito net is a hardship for Bilu. I stop Sadasiu with a gesture. Today is Monday. My day of silence. Mahatmaji observes a day of silence in order to purify himself. We cannot but do whatever he regards as good. I break my fast in the evening on other Mondays, after prayers. I break my silence after my meal. Sadasiu has observed my habits and has come to prepare a place for my prayers. Sadasiu is a good boy, really Siva the Good. A few years ago he signed the pledge to be self-sufficient in matters of clothing and has spun at least a thousand yards of thread a day ever since.

Upper Division Ward. A very large hall. Thirty-four prisoners are here now, nineteen security prisoners, fifteen political. Some are serving their sentences, other are under trial. My place is beside the door in the middle. The middle has been kept free to make a passage. Iron cots are ranged against the walls on both sides. A mosquito net hangs above each cot. A table, a chair and a book rack stand beside the beds. Mirrors, combs and other toilet articles are neatly arranged on the tables. Most of the tables have covers. Blankets are spread on the floor beside the beds. This place is very much like a college dormitory. No one would guess that it is a jail if there were no warders, bars, locks and keys. Last August Harihar and his old father were brought here as prisoners under trial. The doddering old man mistook the place for a pilgrims' rest house. He thought he would be taken to prison later. He kept asking his son when they were going to be removed to a jail. The police released him not long after. When I came to jail in 1921-22 prison was as different from this as earth from heaven. I was an ordinary prisoner. Every prisoner had to work. We were made to salute the government by crying, "Salaam Sarkar!" That caused a lot of trouble. The harsh voice of the trusty in charge of us pursued us wherever we went, "March in double file!" We had to march in double file even to the latrine. Each of us had to carry an iron bowl. That bowl was used for everything. We were punished with bar fetters, made to stand indefinitely, our hands handcuffed, dressed in sackcloth, for everything. How can such conditions compare with our circumstances today? Behind every improvement, however slight, in

matters of coming and going, in matters of food, in living conditions, lies the struggle and sacrifice of countless forgotten comrades. The authorities have a strange sense of justice. They have put me in the Upper Division. My wife also. But our son Bilu is in Division Three.

Let me sit down with my spinning wheel. Nothing else is as calming. I've often found that nervous tension dissipates slowly when a person concentrates on spinning steadily. Doctors may smile, Socialists may mock, but I know from experience. I have taken up my spinning wheel and open it. Sadasiu seems to wish to say something. Why is he still standing there otherwise? I ask him what it is with a look. He answers diffidently, "Some of us wish to join you in your spinning. Will it inconvenience you?" I give my permission with a gesture. Why are boys so formal nowadays? Strange! It's a joy to sit and spin together. I'll be much relieved if they have the wit to realise it. Why do they ask my permission? It's what I want. The trouble lies in you boys. The Socialists are always on the watch to enroll you as members of their party. How can I rely upon you? How embarrassed I was the other day when the suggestion was made that we hold morning as well as evening prayers. I heard even Meher Chand remarking behind my back, with mockery, that prayers twice a day are too much on an allowance of ten annas a day. Let the authorities give us an allowance of a rupee and four annas for food, he said, and he would be willing to pray twice. He said he has heard our allowance will be raised to twelve annas a day soon because of the rising cost of living. When it is, he added, he'll agree to hold morning prayers one day a week. He laughed. If he doesn't wish to pray he need not. But should he not feel ashamed to joke about it? He is a follower of Gandhi, a satyagrahi. He is not an atheist. If Meher Chand is going to cut jokes about sacred things how can I blame Socialists for saying whatever comes into their heads?

Sadasiu and Meher Chand are laying the blankets in a long line on the floor. My place is in the middle of the ward. To the left of the door as one enters it are the followers of Gandhiji, the majority in the Congress. A Communist and a member of the Kisan Sabha are also on this side. These two do not know why the Government is holding them in deten-

tion. They are sincerely eager to co-operate with the government in the present war. The Socialist and the Forward Block group occupy the left side of the hall. I act as buffer. Our places have not been arranged in this way by the jail authorities. We have moved around from time to time to suit our own convenience. The door to the ward is next to my cot. Directly in front is quite a large empty space. It is in line with the entrance passage. Pigeons roost overhead. No cot has been placed there. They are spreading the blankets and sitting down with their spinning wheels in this space. Ram Chandra, Kishan Deo, Ramdani, Sadasiu, Ramsaran Bhusanprasad, Ramlachan, Meher Chand. The majority have names that begin with Ram. All of them, with the exception of Ramdani, are using Yervada spinning wheels. Ramdani has learned to spin since he came to jail, in the hope of having his sentence reduced. He has been sentenced to twelve years on two counts, raiding a police station and burning down a Land Record Office. He has been assigned to spinning by the jail authorities. So he uses a big Bihar spinning wheel given him by the jail. He takes up enough space for two people. The day Ramdani first told the Superintendent that he wished to work and asked to be given work, everybody talked of ostracising him. How can a political prisoner work? Everybody has, I noticed, begun speaking to him again. No sooner are we all seated and the spinning begun than some one on the right side of the ward starts to make a noise with his mouth, imitating the hum of a wheel. Two or three others laugh. Who can it be but Sukhlal? No, not Sukhlal. Comrade Sukhlal. I do not remember. The fellow can caricature very well.

How can so many people spin by the light of only two lanterns? Where can we get more light? The ration of kerosene has been cut because of the war. I think the ration is about an ounce per person, or less. That is why three or four of us have to share a lantern. An electric bulb is burning outside the ward. What harm would it do to put a bulb or two inside? I do not understand the way the mind of the government works. They are afraid that prisoners will commit suicide if electric light is supplied. As if prisoners are so eager to kill themselves! All the older wells in the prison have strong wooden covers for the same reason. There is no lack

of precedents. A prisoner old jump into a well once somewhere. Several prisoners in the ward came down with bacillary dysentery the other day. I suggested to the doctor that a bottle of Electrolictic Chlorine be kept in our ward. I promised to see that all the prisoners used it regularly in their drinking water. The doctor apologised, "Please forgive me. Don't ask me to do a thing like that. I'm due to retire on a pension three years from now. Departmental action has already been taken against me twice. Once a prisoner drank a bottle of liniment. Another drank phenol. An explanation was demanded of me. How did the prisoner obtain such a large amount of phenol? As if anyone cannot get it from the boy who sweeps! This department is unpredictable."

It is pleasant to listen to the sound of many spinning wheels revolving together, as if an aeroplane were passing overhead. It reminds me that I am not alone in my efforts to build a golden India. This is not merely the spinning of so many yards of cotton thread. The wheel has a special significance. It is the only weapon we have with which to restore the golden age of Ram. The reign of Ram shall be the reign of love, of Gouranga. People shall forget hatred and violence. They will work, eat and live together in happiness. No one shall be in want. Milch cows will be in every cowshed, grain in every bin. We draw nearer to our objective with every yard that is spun. Each helps the other. The rich shall give homestead lands to the poor. The villages will no longer look outside for the things they need. All the ways in which the poor are exploited will be blocked. They will not depend upon anybody. Who can exploit them? Community spinning makes me aware that there are others who think as I think. Large numbers of political workers are forsaking our way. It has become the fashion to be a Socialist whether you understand Socialism or not, agree or not. The boys were brought up in a way and so taught that I was led to think it would never be possible for them to abandon our ideals. When the few who are left leave me will I begin to doubt myself? Russia is drawing everybody's attention. The Vedas, our great epics, the wise men of old, the whole history of our country is being forgotten. Is Russia greater than your own country? We also studied history, the history of many countries including Russia and India. We too

thrilled to the immortal stories of Mazzini, Garibaldi, Washington, Kossuth. Their example inspired us when we were students. But we didn't forget the glory of Sivaji. We have not forgotten the teaching of Vivekananda or abandoned it for the gibberish of Marxism. I can't consider Stalin greater than Gandhi. Why shouldn't you read the writings of foreign thinkers? Read them. Did we not study Bentham, Spencer, Mill? Must you forget yourselves completely? Or forget what is your own? If I had tried to explain all this to Bilu when he first joined the Congress Socialist Party things might have turned out differently. If I could have controlled Bilu, Nilu also would not have slipped away from my influence. If you pull an ear the head follows. Nilu imitates everything Bilu does, good or bad, whether he understands it or not.

But can anyone be held to a creed by force? Particularly a boy of intelligence? Bilu is a grown man. Should I try to discipline him? Why? Because his opinions are not the same as mine? If I do not respect his individuality to that extent, if I do not permit freedom of thought, what becomes of the forbearance and tolerance we preach? The boys are not stupid. Have they not thought out for themselves all the things I could have told them? They were brought up in a political ashram, in the atmosphere of the opinions I hold. They know all the finest shades of argument. They have heard them discussed many times in many places. Bilu was in Sabarmati Ashram for three months. Both Nilu and Bilu have had the opportunity to take the dust of Mahatmaji's feet. They were photographed with Gandhiji in the Purnea Ashram. They did know Gandhiji although their contact with him was brief. It would be an impertinence for me to try to influence them in a way he could not. Did I take anybody's advice when I threw up my job in the Government school and entered politics? The whole world forbade me! The Director of Public Instruction put my resignation aside and sent for me. He wanted to discuss the matter with me, to dissuade me. I went to see the Englishman at his Patna residence. Even his valet knew about my resignation. At other times he had to be flattered or tipped into taking my card in to his master. And the office orderly would put on an air of grandiose indifference. But that time he bowed respectfully to my feet. "The Master

Saheb, I hear, has joined the Congress," he said, his face flushing with the pleasure of being able to convey his regard to me, of being able to oblige me. "I would also like to join the Swarajists and serve you," he blurted. "My son will finish the Middle English School next year. I'll get a job for him with the saheb's help. After that I can join you." The Director of Public Instruction had a high opinion of me. He had been the Principal of my college when I took my B.T. degree. Taking my hands in his he made me sit down, speaking to me as a teacher speaks to a pupil, not as a superior addresses a subordinate. When I left he said, "Sanyal, you're making a mistake. Think it over again." I answered, "I've been mistaken for a long time. I won't make the same mistake again." Old Mitter, our neighbour, took me to the brick kiln behind the temple of Kali and expostulated with me. His emotion was genuine and deep. "Why are you getting mixed up with all this? You're married. You have a wife and children. Is it right for you to take the plunge without first considering the consequences? Purnea is a part of India. If India gets her freedom Purnea will also be freed. This place will not be left out." Different people used different arguments to dissuade me. Did I listen to any of them? The only person I asked was Bilu's mother. And even that was not exactly a question. I had made up my mind. It was more in the nature of an announcement. I do not know what she thought. She only said, "Do what you think best. What opinion can a woman have?" I never act according to others' opinions. I've always done what seemed to me to be best. Why should Bilu be any different? Why should he do what I tell him?

One of the spinning wheels is creaking like a cart wheel. The continuous grating is harsh to the ear. It's as unbearable as the sound of a metal dish dragged across a cement floor. Like rubbing soft flesh with sandpaper. I never noticed such nervous susceptibility in myself before coming to prison this time. I've always been proud of the fact that my nerves are strong, that I am not easily upset. What has happened this time? The creaking is surely coming from Ramdani's wheel. I turn my eyes from the thread I am spinning and look back at him. His eyes have met mine. His expression is apologetic, as though the fault were his. Now he has left the wheel and is getting

up. He is hurrying towards his cot. Everybody is looking at him. Perhaps they are wondering at his lack of manners. To get up and leave in the midst of ritual spinning! Ramdani has come back, carrying a bottle of oil. Drop by drop he pours the oil into the wheel. Now he is spinning again. Everybody is spinning. Now and then they look at me. Why? Is there any change in my manner? Does the inner struggle which has occupied me for some days now, my doubt, show in my eyes and face? Can a person hide his feelings? Perhaps fasting in the heat has made me look tired. No, I've fasted every Monday for a long time now. It's not the fasting. How can I repay them for their sympathy? They are spinning with me so that for some time at least, I can forget my anxiety. They all want to share my burden in order to lighten it for me.

Bilu's complexion is fair. His head is a mass of thick curly hair. His face is long and oval, like a woman's. The chin is narrow, his eyes deep and black with a thoughtful expression. Whenever I look at him he lowers his eyes. But I have seen those eyes flash lightning. It happened some days before I resigned my job. The Planters Club is next to the High School. A wire fence divides the two enclosures. There was, it appeared, a charity fête in progress at the club. The ladies had opened stalls for the sale of various kinds of luxury goods. Nilu and Bilu were sitting on the fence watching the merrymaking of the foreigners. Nilu was very small. Bilu stood on the middle wire and held him. Suddenly I saw Mr. Perin of Kajhakuti entering our gate. He was carrying a cane and his expression was arrogant and wrathful. "The ladies have opened stalls at the club," he said to me, "What are the boys gaping at the whole of the twenty-four hours, sitting there on the fence?" He went on, "You see, Headmaster, if you don't put a stop to it, we will. This indecency shall not be allowed." The saheb pointed with his cane to where Nilu and Bilu were sitting on the wire. And he left in the same haughty and unmannerly way he had come. I called Bilu to me and scolded him, "Be careful! Don't go over there any more." The boy who could never look me in the face raised his eyes and I saw in them his latent manhood. His eyes sparked as he demanded, "Why not? What harm does it do if I go over there?" He was asking *me* why. I took him by the ear and dragged him into the house. His

mother was in the kitchen. "Look at what your good little boy has done! How can I keep my job if he goes and quarrels with the foreigners?" Later, from the veranda of my room, I heard Bilu arguing with his mother. "What's wrong with our watching the fête from our own land?" That night Bilu refused to eat any supper. Whether it was from anger or hurt I do not know. Late that night his mother woke me. Bilu was not in his bed. Where was Bilu? Look! Look! The servants, the school watchman, I myself, all set out with lanterns and canes. Bilu's mother was weeping bitterly. And she blamed me. Bilu was a little boy. How could it offend the foreign ladies if he watched their merrymaking? Bilu was nowhere to be found. At last one of the boarders discovered him. He was sitting on the fence in the same spot from which he and Nilu had watched the fête. The lights had been put out long ago. But Bilu, to prove the unjustness of my reprimand, and in order to suit his action to his own logic, irrefutable as it was, had come out to sit here alone in the cold and darkness of a winter night. He had nothing on him except a light green shawl. His bare feet and arms were as cold as ice.

Bilu can never be forced to do anything. But he'll do everything for people who take advantage of his soft heart, flatter or deceive him. He resists any application of force or any kind of pressure with all his strength. His naturally submissive manner changes instantly. I've seen this again and again in him, ever since he was a child. One day, some twenty years ago, I heard his mother shouting. I left the District Congress Office where I was working and went into the house Bilu's mother was crying, "Confess! There's still time. You must have licked the Mohammedan's spittle Do you deny it again?" She was threatening to strike the boy with an iron ladle. In her other hand she was holding the tea-pot with a broken spout in which she kept semolina. In her anger she had forgotten to put the tea-pot down. I heard the whole story. Bilu and Nilu had gone into the orchard of Behbud the lawyer to eat plums. The lawyer's son-in-law had caught them. He threatened to tell their father and give them a good beating unless they spat on a plum leaf, licked the spittle and promised never to steal plums again. Nilu was so frightened he did as he was told but Bilu refused. Bilu had, it seems, said a great many things. The

lawyer's son-in-law let them go. But his daughter came to complain to Bilu's mother. The boys had, she said, insulted her husband. The whole affair became known. Bilu's mother had not yet gone into the real question, the stealing of the plums and the insulting. She was stressing the aspect of the affair which was the most important to her. Nilu had licked spittle. Was the spittle his own or that of the lawyer's son-in-law?

Ho! Ho! Ho! The laughter shakes the room. It startled me. It drowns the humming of all these revolving wheels. Two places down on my left bedsheets and window curtains have been strung together to make a kind of cubicle. Inside it the Socialist Party holds its classes on *Das Capital*. The four who belong to the Forward Block do not attend the class. They sit together in the daytime and read Marxist books. The other young men are studying *Das Capital*. What do they find in it that is so amusing? And what is the need of sitting behind curtains in this heat? Boys nowadays are strange! Spirals of smoke are rising from the cubicle. Have they put up the curtains in order to be better able to smoke their cigarettes? No, those days are long since past. They do not need privacy for smoking any more. One of them, Comrade Banarsi, younger than Bilu, Bilu's pupil, comes to talk to me about Bilu with a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. All of them borrow from their personal accounts in the jail office and outside.

"How many are you?"

It must be eleven o'clock. The new warder has come. Someone shouts from the cubicle, "Go away. Don't make so much noise." Another sings out, "There are seven and a half prisoners in this ward." The warder goes away, grumbling. "They eat bread and chicken eggs," he complains, "and they've come to jail in the cause of Gandhiji!"

"Quick, Baidynath. Get up. Pour water from the jug over the rascal."

Laughter greeted the sally. Comrade Baidyanath emerges from the cubicle with a glass of water in his hand. He is a thin, shrunken little man. His flesh hangs from his bones like loosely twisted string. He is wearing a high-collared tunic and pyjamas. All the Socialists cut their clothes in this fashion. They've persuaded the prisoner who acts as tailor in the ward-

robe room to make them. They give him cigarettes. Even in heat like this the Socialists never go barebodied. And these are the people who are to establish the rule of the dispossessed on earth!

Eleven o'clock has struck. It's time to stop spinning. The spindles and cotton slivers are all neatly put away in their places and the spinners are ready to get up. How many can spin more than two hours at a stretch? When I was in Hazaribagh prison, during the Individual Satyagraha, I span for eight hours together on Gandhiji's birthday. My kidney trouble developed afterwards. I have not spun long at a time since. My illness may have had some other cause but the jail doctor was of the opinon that it was caused by sitting so long in the same position. One cannot argue with a doctor. The spinners have gone back to their own places. Sadasiu and Meher Chand are standing front of me.

"Master Saheb, have something to eat." Meher Chand is saying, "You haven't had anything all day. There's food on the table for you. Please take a piece or two of unleavened bread."

I scribble my answer on a piece of paper. I have no appetite in this heat.

"Let me bring you a little curd," Meher Chand says. "Curd was sent to me from home today. It's made from the milk of our own cow. I wouldn't offer it to you otherwise. You're a member of the Gandhi Seva Sangha. Who does not know that you don't drink buffalo's milk or eat curd made from it? In jail you do not get either milk or curd. I'll be very sorry indeed if you refuse some of the curd I'm lucky enough to have sent me from home."

Meher is standing in a quite theatrical pose, with his hands pressed together entreatingly. "Please, Master Saheb. My father brought it with him when he came to see me." Again he has used the English word 'father'. People in Bihar stop using the old familiar words for their nearest relations as soon as they learn a little English. A young man will speak of the marriage of his 'sister'. Another, with a shaven head, will answer that his 'mother' has died when asked the reason for his mourning. It is not that they use many English words but they grow diffident about using common designations for their intimate relationships. English words lend them a certain dignity.

"When he left Father said again and again that he was anxious for you to have some. It's been made from milk boiled over a fire of cow dung. It's first class."

He's putting it in a way that makes it difficult to refuse. He'll really be disappointed if I don't eat a little. I consent with a gesture. He'll keep on for an hour if I don't. I know him well. Meher Chand and Sadasiu exchange significant glances. So, it is Sadasiu who has instigated Meher Chand! He didn't dare to approach me himself. Sadasiu must have told him not to give in until I consented. Meher Chand has closed his spinning wheel and is getting up. Now he is folding the blankets and stacking them in a corner. He has placed my mug and towel beside the steel cylinder of water. He is bringing my wooden slippers out from under the bed and has placed them in front of me. My own sons have never looked after me with such care. And I do not remember ever asking it of them. Before I resigned my job I did, on occasion, ask Nilu and Bilu to pull out my grey hairs during the long noons on holidays, but I did it in order to keep the boys out of the sun.

Since 1921 I have deliberately refrained from accepting anyone's service. Bilu's mother complains about it. She has wept a good deal. This new pair of wooden sandals were given to me five months ago by Ramcharitji. I could not say no. And I like them. Later I heard Bisundeo asking him, "How much did you pay for the straps?" Ramcharitji answered, "Four cigarettes for the straps and six cigarettes for the wood." Bisundeo exclaimed, "So expensive! For ten cigarettes one can get a blanket. People like you ruin the market." So. The straps are broad and of a new type. Nice. They must have been made in the jail factory. To return the sandals would offend him. But I have not used them to this day. I keep them under my cot. Sadasiu has pulled them out now. It is difficult for me to abide by my principles in this company. I push them under again. I go to the steel cylinder and wash my face and hands. Sadasiu hands me the towel. The place beside the water cylinder is Dasji's. He is snoring. Every time he draws a breath the air is expelled through his mouth. His lips shake, making a noise like a horse munching grass. He goes to bed early in the evening and falls asleep at once. He gets up at two o'clock in the morning. How can he sleep at eight in the evening in this

heat? We read of death-at-will, *ichha mrityu,* in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. But sleep-at-will is not a lesser achievement. Prayers are held in the ward after sundown. The noise is general. But his sleep is not in the least disturbed.

Meher Chand is standing beside my cot making a cold drink for me with the curd. "What shall I sweeten it with, palm sugar or molasses?" he asks, adding, "I happen to have a little palm sugar." I indicate with a gesture that I prefer the molasses. He has made a big bowl of the mixture. Sadasiu spreads my blanket on the floor. He sprinkles the space in front of it with water, sets the bowl there and puts an aluminium tumbler beside it. I pour myself a glassful. It is curd, thinned curd, not really a drink. Even the tumblers given us in jail are odd. You cannot drink out of one without spilling a little of the contents on your clothes and person. The curd is very sweet.

"I had an interview this morning," Meher Chand is talking, "Two earthen pots of curd and one of sesamum balls. Perhaps the people in the office were tempted. Who knows? The Jailor ordered the Head Warder to plunge a stick down to the bottom of the curd to see if there was anything else in the pots. Then he said the doctor would issue a permit when he came and the pots should be set aside for him. I wonder why the Jailor was so angry with me. He doesn't treat any of the others this way. I gave the Head Warder four sesamum balls and brought the stuff away."

He seemed to remember something. "The sesamum balls are made with sugar," he apologized, "so I do not dare to offer you any. May I give you another glass, Master Sahcb?" I refused. It's difficult for me to finish one glass. Another! I wash and sit down on the blanket. Meher Chand is singing out, beating time against the metal container with a glass, "Come on! Come on! Who wants a cool drink?" Bisundeo is the only one who takes a glass. If it had been made with sugar some of the others would also have enjoyed a drink. Bisundeo has good health. He can eat as much as two pounds of unleavened bread at a time. He is young. But will he drink the whole pot so late at night, after finishing his supper? Nobody in this ward likes cold drinks made with molasses. And Bilu? Third Division prisoners are grateful for any molasses they can get. Even for an onion or a chili. Twice a week they are given a bit of chutney as a pre-

ventive against scurvy. How they eat on the days they get it! Their rice is not enough for them. The chutney makes every grain tasty. Nothing is left over to eat with their lentil soup. Even the chili in their soup for which they have fought so hard is wasted on such occasions. Bilu likes rice twice a day. Who knows whether he gets it here or not? Rice twice a day is a "Bengal diet" according to the jail code. Those who do not get it are given, in the evening, two large rounds of unleavened bread, flat and about four feet in circumference. To digest the doughy, ill-cooked things is an impossible feat for an ordinary Bengali. Only a hero like Goban or Bhim Bhabani can do it! I would like Bilu to know that this time, because of him, I am not eating any of the fruit or milk supplied by the jail nor do I use a mosquito net. The knowledge might be of some comfort to him. He would know that his father feels for him. Bilu would have been taking a class himself if he had not been sent to the gallows. He might have been explaining *Das Capital* to the other members of his party in a curtained-off cubicle like this one. Comrade Lachhmi Chaturvedi would not have to play the role of teacher if Bilu were here. Bilu taught at the summer training camp the Socialists held at Maniharighat. Comrade Banarasi told me about it the other day. He smoked his cigar while he talked to me. "Nobody in our party can explain things the way Bilu Babu can," he said, "When our provincial summer camp was opened at Sonepur he was asked to take a class on dialectical materialism. Bilu Babu holds a very high place among the intellectuals of our party, if we speak of genuine workers. Nothing need be said about opportunists. Of course Bilu Babu is not very militant. That is why he has not risen to the top and became a leader." Comrade Banarasi said a great deal more. It is difficult to remember it all. When they talk they made use of words of which we do not know the real meaning. I scarcely know what they are talking about. Do they talk this way even at home? When half of what they say is unintelligible to us how can their mothers and sisters understand them? There is that story about the boy who decided, on beginning to study English, that he would not speak in any other language to his mother. He fell ill and died of thirst. His mother did not know what the word water meant. That's the way it'll be. Bilu is also one of the leaders of their party but I've never

heard him using long complicated words. I do not know how he used to speak with other members of his party but at home I never heard him use any uncommon terminology out of the Socialist dictionary. And I never saw him dressed in pyjamas or a high-collared tunic. Nor did I ever smell a whiff of tobacco on his person. Perhaps I do not understand what you people mean by the word militant. You say a man who is giving his life for his country on the gallows is not militant. And why should he be militant? You call that shrunken little Baidyanath militant, the fellow who, a little while ago, came out from behind the curtain with a glass of water to throw on the warder. Shame! What thoughts are these? Would I have been proud if Bilu had been militant? Mahatmaji, permit me to touch your feet! Banarasi may have spoken truly. Bilu has been brought up in the atmosphere of the Ashram, under my influence. Not to be militant is natural to him. Sadasiu is sitting on my table, dangling his legs. He is watching me. He must be wondering why I bowed so abruptly. And he may have construed it in his own way.

"Bisundeo Babu! Bisundeo Babu!"

Bisundeo's place is on the left, two or three cots away. A warder is calling to him from outside. There is a window opposite his cot. Bisundeo has quite a big business outside the prison. He is a merchant. And he has built up a considerable business inside the prison also. He is our kitchen manager. He knows the Jail contractor. This warder acts as a go-between, carrying information and articles from one to the other. The contractor supplies less than the requisitioned ration and the manager signs a slip saying that he has received the full quota. Then this warder brings him things not on the ration list at night. The jail authorities know about it more or less and in order to stop it have tried several times to issue supplies from the jail stores according to a schedule. But to issue everything every day according to a schedule in this wartime market is difficult. And there is trouble unless the supplies are on time. The Upper Division prisoners may start a hunger strike or they may refuse to be locked up. Of course they can be quelled temporarily by force, a good clubbing. But if that sort of thing happens too often the Superintendent and the Jailor may get a reputation for tactlessness in their departments. An order of

transfer will follow within a short time. Nor is there any hope of hushing the affair up by a good beating when security prisoners are present in the jail. Security prisoners can only be beaten up by the order of the District Magistrate. And the shortage of accommodation in the jail is so acute now that it is not possible to isolate the security prisoners. Taking these and other things into consideration the jail authorities prefer that the politicals should not make any trouble. And if they can get things by keeping one eye shut why should they bother to interfere? Their share of the contractor's dues is unaffected. This is convenient for Bisundeo. He is talking to the warder in a low voice. What they are saying cannot be heard. "Sepoyji, would you like to have a glass of cool curd?" Bisundeo raises his voice suddenly. "Thank you," the warder answers. The glass cannot be passed out through the bars. "Wait a minute. I'll bring a cup." Oh, so this is why he wanted the curd even though it has been sweetened with molasses. The warder has gone away. He must be on duty in another ward. Bhusanji has let his mosquito net down and gone to bed. His cot is beside Bisundeo's. "What've you got this time?" he asks from inside his net. Bisundeo has twenty bundles of Indian cigarettes. Bisundeo has cigarettes brought in every night and sends them to be sold in the jail factory the next day through one of the trusties. The ordinary prisoners buy them for ten copper coins a bundle. Bisundeo makes a good profit. Anyone who might make trouble is pacified by occasional gifts of scented hair oil and other little luxuries. He also has an arrangement with the prisoners who work in the store room, a glass of ghee for two bundles of cigarettes, a pound of sugar for one. Cigarettes are legal tender in the jail. Bhusanji is speaking to Bisundeo, "Please give me a bundle," he says, "My woollen tunic hasn't been washed since last winter. I must send it to the laundry unit tomorrow. And ironing. Please ask the contractor to bring me a bottle of fountain pen ink tomorrow. I," he added, laughing, "am one of your shareholders." For shareholder he used the word *jhattananda,* a word that has a history. Bisundeo once made up a doggerel verse. I don't remember the whole of it but the sense was that political prisoners are like holy mendicants and can be divided into three sects. The members of the first are called *iogaranandas,* the Obtainers. By flattering the

doctor, bribes and cigarettes, and an occasional display of temper, they obtain all kinds of things. They lack nothing in jail, not even liquor, except their wives and children. They are always on the lookout. Nothing escapes them. The second set is made up of the Pouncers, the *jhattanandas*. These prisoners are usually very quiet and idle. They pretend to be aloof and assume an attitude of indifference. Like hawks perched high in a tree they appear lost in meditation while they are actually on the watch for prey. These men keep on eye on whatever the Obtainers are able to get hold of. Then they present themselves and demand a share. Obtainers incur a risk but Pouncers have nothing to fear. Of course they get fewer things. The Obtainers are forced, against their will, to give them something. Troublemakers have to be kept quiet. The third type of prisoner is called, in the doggerel, *bekubananda*, the Stupid. They are the majority. They want very much to get hold of things or to share whatever the others are able to get, but they have no guts. They are afraid that, even if they are not caught, others may spread slanderous rumours about them And if they are caught their reputations will suffer. So they take the prudent course and keep out of trouble, gossiping about the first two categories.

The young men on the right are coming out from behind their curtain noisily. Their class is over. They stay up nights to study although they have the whole day at their disposal. Not one of them gets out of bed before 8 o'clock in the morning. But it pleases me to see that they still like to study even after joining politics I was a teacher. It always rejoices me to find young people reading and thinking. All of them are keen students, the Socialists, the Forward Block boys, the Communists and the two members of the Kisan Sabha. The comparison with workers of our way of thinking is surprising. There are only three members of the Forward Block here yet they spend a lot of money buying the works of Marx. The Communists are always studying some new books or pamphlets. Just try to hold a class by the clock for our group! Nobody attends. It's been tried. I started a class last winter on our constructive work programme Sadasiu's enthusiasm encouraged me. The class was his suggestion. We held it under the wood apple tree. Some came for the first week. Only Sadasiu,

Dasji and Ramsaranji stuck it out to the end. The class on the history of the Russian Revolution which was held under the auspices of the C.S.P. was crammed with students. Even our boys attended. That is only natural. The programmes of Nilu's and Bilu's parties take their stand on man as he is today while our programme of work is based upon the ideal of man purged of violence and avarice. That is why these parties have a greater attraction for ordinary people.

Nilu and Bilu are both very keen on study. And the members of our party? What's the good of talking about them? Whenever I sit down with a book they ask, "Is the Master Saheb going to take another examination?" Ramchandraji and Hariharji are the only ones at all fond of reading. Ramchandraji reads books on hydropathy and Hariharji reads books on yoga and breath control. They have an idea that those who believe in Gandhiji's teaching have nothing to learn. Nilu does not make fun of us without reason. I have often heard him tease his mother as she packed my suitcase when I had to go on a trip, "Have you put the old issues of *Sarvodaya* in?" Nilu has never been quick to distinguish light matters from serious ones. He is very different from Bilu in this. Nilu is very excitable. When he gets angry he forgets himself completely.

Bilu's mother was on the kitchen porch. Nilu and Bilu were sitting apart as though neither had anything to do with the other. Bilu and his mother were crying. And Nilu was writing or drawing something on the smooth earthen floor with a straw from the broom Near him lay a big curved knife. When I approached them his mother tried to conceal something with a cloth. The whole thing came out when I questioned them. Bilu accidentally upset the inkwell on the cover of Nilu's storybook, The Caramel Doll. Nilu, in resentful fury, had chopped Bilu's copy of Marsden's History to pieces with the knife. He had actually cut it in half. It looked like two small notebooks. Strange boy! Their mother has indulged the boys too much. The boy did wrong and, instead of coming to me about it, she was trying to hush the matter up.

"Now then Sadasiu, is the meeting of the Bhumiya Rajput National Assembly over?" Comrade Baidyanath asks sarcastically. He is referring to our spinning. Extremists in Bihar, that is to say, Socialists, Forward Blockers, Communists and mem-

bers of the Kisan Sabha, make fun of the right wingers by denouncing the provincial Congress organisation as the mouthpiece of the rivalry between the Bhumiya and Rajput castes. There are, they say, no political alignments in the Congress organisation. Groups form around castes and around personalities. The allegation is true to some extent. I notice that, even in jail, Ramsaranji and Hariharn try to form their own small cliques on the basis of caste in order that they may retain their leadership when they go outside. Will our country ever be free? At times I feel disgusted. What Nilu's party and Bilu's party allege is not false. But what connection has caste rivalry with the community spinning in which they all participated a little while ago? Sadasiu is the same age as Baidyanath. But to speak to him so rudely when he is sitting beside me is to affront me as well. What harm would it do for him to show a little respect for his elders?

"Keep quiet, Laldasiya!" Sadasiu retorts. "There's a saying that anything can be accomplished by feeding Brahmins, flattering Rajputs, bribing Kayasthas and beating up other castes. You won't hesitate to leave your party if you're paid enough! Don't I know you Kayasthas!"

Baidyanath is a Kayastha. Kayasthas from Mithila often have Lal or Das as their surnames. This is the reason they are called Laldasiyas. They are managers of landowners' estates, their representatives and rent collectors, enjoying a monopoly of such jobs. The peasants do not like them very much. Laldasiya has therefore come to mean not only Kayasthas from a certain locality but, by association, a person of an avaricious and venal disposition.

"There is another proverb which you may recall," Baidyanath answers, "Curd once noticed by a Brahmin and grass noticed by milkman share the same fate."

Sadasiu is a Bhumiya Brahmin. "I admit that," he concedes, "Didn't you see? The Master Saheb ate the curd I offered him. Kayasthas prolong arguments needlessly by refusing to admit that proverbs are true."

Sadasiu gets off the table and goes up to Baidyanath. They are whispering together. What secret have they suddenly decided to share? One of the leaders of Baidyanath's party is going to the gallows tonight and yet they behave just as they

do on other days. There is little change in the behaviour of the men on my left also No impression whatsoever seems to have been made. No. They must all feel it or why, with the exception of Dasji, should they all be still awake? Bhusanji and Bisundeo have let their mosquito nets down and are lying on their cots but they were talking up to a minute ago They are not asleep Mosquito nets are down over many of the cots One cannot see to any distance But the murmur of conversation can be heard Those lines in the Ballad of Reading Goal by Oscar Wilde come to mind

"But there is no sleep when men must weep
Who never yet have wept,
So we the fool, the fraud, the knave –
That endless vigil kept,
And through each brain, on hands of pain
Another's terror crept

I don't remember any more I gave up teaching long ago It is amazing that I still remember as much as I do Now let me try to recall the rest No I cannot think of any more now It'll come suddenly unexpectedly Is it fear that is keeping them all awake? Perhaps it is sympathy No, they're not keeping awake deliberately It's because they cannot sleep They try to ease the heaviness of their hearts by talking My own heart is quiet I may not love my children as deeply as I should How can it be that my heart is not disturbed? Sadasiu and Baidyanath have drawn up chairs and placed them beside Baidyanath's cot What are they going to do with chairs so late at night? Sadasiu has come over and taken a seat on my cot I'm sitting on a blanket on the floor Baidyanath, Lachhmi Chaturvedi, Ramprakash and Gridhar have taken the chairs Are they going to keep awake the whole night? Bilu is in the habit of staying up late to study How often I've scolded him What's he doing now? Perhaps he's pacing up and down wildly in his cell Will he not think of his father? He is not the boy to be frightened! But he does not spin and he does not believe in God If he did either he might, on this night, find in them a source of strength The Sanskrit teacher of the local school is the religious instructor of the prison. On

Sundays he comes to preach to Hindu prisoners. He got the job while I was still Headmaster. The other day he came to see me. Bilu is his pupil. He told me sadly that he had been to see Bilu in his cell. Bilu had told him that he had no need of religious instruction. The teacher also told me that Bilu did not neglect the customary courtesy and bowed to his feet with proper respect. Bilu is not the boy to be careless about manners. Now, isn't it possible to be a Socialist if you believe in God? There are numerous yellow-robed monks in all political parties. Don't they believe in God? The other day I gave the Assistant Jailor a pocket-sized Gita for Bilu. The next day he gave it back, saying, "Your son said he does not need this book. He'll read any other good books you send him." I had some other books with me. I gave them to the Jailor and begged him to give them to Bilu. He excused himself. "I have the right to give a prisoner religious books," he said, "but to give a Third Class prisoner any other book the permission of the Superintendent is necessary. The Superintendent is a good man, very lenient. He asked your son if he needs anything. The prisoner himself, in the Superintendent's presence, said he did not need anything."

Bilu was right. Bilu can be expected to say that. He will go with his head high. He'll keep it high to the end. Bilu, the boy who is not militant, will go with a nonchalant smile, kicking aside all pettiness. His face will be a glory and he will glorify my name.

Punch published a cartoon after the last war which comes to mind now. Two elderly lords, sitting on the plush couch of a most aristocratic club, are resting their carefully groomed and bulbous persons among its cushions. They're both smoking cigars. Bottles and glasses are on the table in front of them. They're telling each other how many of their sons have been killed in the war. Neither of them grieves for the boys. To them the terrible deaths of the young men are nothing more than a necessity compared to the glory of defeating the enemy. Yet the glory was founded on them. Who was to think of that? My pride is just as ludicrous. I feel no hesitation about claiming a share of the glory in the deeds of a son towards whom I have not done my duty as a father. If I had not chosen this path would Bilu be where he is today? My father was a gov-

ernment official. I also held a government post. And my son, like the sons of other respectable families, would have in the normal course set about earning his living after he completed his education. He might have had a comfortable family life with a wife and children. My old neighbour Mitter was right. If a man's married, more particularly if he has children, he has no right to do what he likes with his life. His life is no longer his alone. Others have claims upon him. And I had no money so the question did not arise. Those who have money can, in such circumstances, make provision for their families beforehand. But does a man's duty end there? The boys may have had a greater degree of comfort but is comfort the only object of life? Does the sweetness of the relationships which grow up in a family have no value? Was Siddartha fair to his wife and child because he left them in the luxury of a kingdom?

I didn't send Bilu to an English college. He passed the Matriculation examination from an English High School only because his mother had set her heart on it. I wanted him to study in the Bihar Vidyapith. And I had to put up with various kinds of comments from my colleagues because Bilu studied in an English school. When Mahatmaji graced our ashram with the dust of his feet Jayseyal's sister brought the matter to his attention. The lady is eccentric. I know that she did not do it of her own motion. One of my well-wishing colleagues must have instigated her. Mahatma Gandhi said nothing to me. His only comment was, "There must be all kinds in the country. My sons blame me also...." He dismissed the matter with a smile. I was overwhelmed with shame. And both Bilu and Bilu's mother felt the sharpness of the remark. They both decided that, after his matriculation, he would study in the Kashi Vidyapith. Did he learn any less there that he would have learnt in an English college? Nilu has a B.A. degree. Does he know any subject better than Bilu? Most of the boys in Bilu's party have B.A. or M.A. degrees. Why do all of them go to Bilu for instruction? Yet it is true that the title of Shastri which the Vidyapith confers on its students commands very little respect. The day the news of Bilu's success in his exams came I went into the house to give the letter to his mother. "From today," I announced, "Bilu is Purna Chandra Shastri." I had expected her to be glad. But she did not even answer me. She was

kneading small balls of split pulse paste and she went right on with her work, bowing her head. She changed the subject whenever I tried to discuss the subject of education. Bilu has developed an inferiority complex for this and other reasons. His mother considers the education that has been given her son poor. The fault is not the boy's. Our circumstances are to blame and for these circumstances I am obviously responsible. And it is true that a boy as intelligent as Bilu, given the opportunity, might have become a distinguished professor or a famous scientist. He could have made his name known the world over. And I have dragged him into an environment from which it is a relief to come to prison for peace and quiet and rest! He has been brought up in a world where a death sentence is regarded as merely an accident. Bilu is not stupid. He can distinguish right from wrong. He has chosen his own way. He is an adult now. What more could he have done?

I've been startled. Nobody should pound on the door like that. The warder's job is to see if the door is shut. Does he have to display so much strength to do that? Somebody calls out from a nearby cot, "Break it in! Break it in! Yes, do!" A comment from inside a mosquito net follows immediately, "That will be our salvation."

So the warder detailed for one o'clock duty has arrived. He is looking at me. He's a handsome fellow with a big grey moustache. He's caught my eye and lifted his hands in greeting. Now he's turned to the group of four sitting in the chairs and given them a greeting, "*Namaste*! I hope you're all comfortable." Lachhmi Chaturvedi exclaims, "O, Singhji! It's you. You haven't been on duty here for a long time. What was the matter?"

"I went home on a week's leave. I got back yesterday. Tell me the news of the war."

"What news can we give you? We live in jail. It's you who can bring us news from outside. You ask us!"

"You read the English dailies. That's why I asked." The warder is now giving all sorts of information about the war, the town, his village and Mahatmaji. Large numbers of jackals have been loaded into freight trains and sent to the battlefields. The roof of the Viceroy's residence cracked mysteriously the day Gandhiji started his fast. He tells us what happened to

the Dewan of Rajkote when he opposed Gandhi and other similar stories. He's over-eager to impart to us all these items of news. His first questions were only introductory. Now he's sitting on the veranda outside Baidyanath's window in order to chat the better. On other days nobody is awake during his night duty. It is very lonely and dull. His two hours drag slowly by as he paces up and down, wakens the other guards, chews tobacco and dozes. Baidyanath and his friends do not like that the warder should join them in their vigil.

"Singhji," says Baidyanath, "in the old days you locked Kisunji's mother up with Kishunji. Now you lock up Gandhiji's followers with Gandhiji."

"How can a person escape his fate? We didn't keep Kishunji locked up long, did we? Who can tell how long you people will be here? There's no end to this blasted war. Krishna! Krishna!"

Baidyanath and his friends burst out laughing. They've trapped Singhji. It makes him furious for anybody to say 'Radhakrishna!' He insists that everyone say 'Sitaram!' Now he has, unwittingly, taken the name of Krishna himself. The warder laughs shamefacedly, claps his hand and departs at a run. "Listen, Singhji, listen!" Baidyanath calls after him, "come back and hear about our release." Singhji is already on the other side of the ward. Every warder carries a lantern. Singhji has left his in front of the window. Comrade Girdhar passes a cup between the bars and empties the kerosene from the lantern into it. He draws the cup in and pours the oil into our lantern. Kerosene is very scarce because of the war. The prisoners are talking about release. The tone of the Home Member's statement, what Amery has said in Parliament, which Congressmen have been set free, these form the stuff of their hopes and dreams. They try to discover whether there has been any change in the Government's policy. Coming to jail brings a certain sense of relief in the beginning. But it is not long before the life grows monotonous. Then talk of release starts. Nothing else is discussed. All day and all night they talk about it. Anything for it or against it is culled from newspapers and compared. Fudan Babu has taken upon himself the task of collecting evidence in favour of release. What a crowd gathers around him after he has read the newspaper! Bisundeoji has made up

a rhyme about it, a parody of Tulsidas. Some one starts reciting it as soon as the trusty comes in with the bundle of newssheets. In the jingle the poet Tulsidas, in gaol, longs for the paper which will announce that the Government has started negotiations for a truce.

They will, all of them, be released someday, if not today. But Bilu? I'll not be able to take Bilu back with me. I'm old but the desire to live is strong. And how old is Bilu? His whole life is still before him. And it's I, not Bilu, who'll go back. His faith in Gandhiji's teaching might not have been so easily shaken if I had let him get married. When one is married a sense of responsibility develops, the wilder life urges are tempered. Bilu might not have followed the dangerous ways of the Socialists. Kaka Kalelkar, in one of his essays, said the truth in his humorous way. He pointed out that those among the Congress leaders who have wives are gentle of temper, whereas those who are bachelors or widowers are irritable. Neither Jawaharlal, Vallabbhai Patel nor Subhas Bose can ever think anything over calmly. No, perhaps I could not have saved Bilu even if he had not joined the Socialists. So many people have lost their lives in this struggle, people who in their daily lives have had nothing to do with politics. And haven't many of the disciples of Mahatma Gandhi done violent things? Have we taken these things into account? No. Birth and death are things over which no man has any control.

It would have been nice if Bilu had married Saraswati. Both of them would have been happy. Saraswati is a good girl. The police arrested her in August and let her go three months later for want of evidence. She came back to jail on Independence Day, the 26th January. They could have had a family life side by side with their political work if they had married. Even Lenin was married.

Kapildeo and his mother came to talk it over with me. There is some irregularity in their family. A Bihari Bhumiya Brahmin family, owning lands, not very highly educated, would never agree to give one of their women in marriage into a Bengali family otherwise. Of course I had no objection on these grounds. It was Bilu's mother who refused to consent. Bilu was not asked how he felt about it. A modern boy he should have been consulted before I was. But when his mother refused

what good would it have done to prolong the affair by asking him? His mother told me once, long ago, that Bilu thought no political worker should cherish a desire to marry. But Saraswati would have been an ideal match. She is much more capable than a middle-class Bengali girl and she has better health. She is good-looking and has a pleasant way of speaking. She has grown up so quickly. Kapildeo is always busy with some lawsuit or other in the district court and when he comes to town he stays in the Ashram. He nearly always brings Saraswati with him. She came only the other day, pretty in a pink sari, saying she had come to attend the Gulab-bagh fair, riding in an ox-cart with Kapildeo. In our families girls of that age wear short dresses. Bilu's mother gave her something to eat on the kitchen porch. The child burst into tears when she put the bowl of milk to her lips. She could not be made to tell us what was the matter. Sahadeo came and coaxed, flattered and scolded her into confessing. She was accustomed to drinking buffalo's milk and cow's milk tasted so insipid she could not drink it. It's better that the marriage hasn't taken place. There would only have been one more unfortunate woman if it had. My burdens would have been heavier. I would have become so much more involved. And how much longer do I have to live? Nilu will be left. His presence doesn't make any difference. He is so erratic, so irresponsible. He's not to be relied upon. Only Bilu can calm him down. He doesn't pay any attention to anybody else or even treat them as human. He's been inaccessible to discipline since he was a child though he has grown a little more quiet and serious with the years. What a daredevil he was as a boy! Not a day passed but that he was up to something.

Once he killed and cooked a duck belonging to Durga Babu, in the bamboo clump behind the Ashram. Durga Babu came to complain indignantly. I went with him to look for Nilu. Durga Babu's eldest son accompanied us. It was he who had carried the news home. The offender was discovered in the bamboo clump. With him were several other boys from the neighbourhood. Surprisingly Durga Babu's youngest son, Naru, was there too. When Nilu was asked about killing the duck he answered, "Yes, we've all done it together." He seemed to be prepared for the question. Further questioning, re-

vealed that Naru had brought the knife and Nilu had done the killing. Before he did it Nilu made all the others promise to touch him during the act. As he killed the duck the other boys stood behind him, like boys playing a train game. He can think of so many tricks!

Nilu, with his strong physique and placid face, a face untroubled by thought, bears little resemblance to Bilu. Nowadays he looks older. He does and says whatever comes into his head. Difficulties disappear before his irrepressible courage. One is almost afraid to say anything to him because he does not hesitate to answer as he pleases. And before saying anything to Bilu I must stop and think whether my words will hurt him or not. He's so sensitive. He doesn't open his mouth but his eyes grow moist. And Nilu! Nilu never lets an opportunity to strike out at me slip! When the question of Nilu's studying in college was brought up for the first time I didn't raise any objection, because I had noticed that Nilu wanted to go to college. Bilu and Bilu's mother also wanted him to go to college, an English college. Bilu was not satisfied with the education he himself had received at the Kashi Vidyapith. His mother did not consider it an education at all. Everything was settled. Nilu suddenly declared that he would not study in college on Gandhi Seva Sangh money. He thinks of so many things. My small savings, left over from the time I had a job, were almost gone. We had eaten into them slowly. I founded the Ashram with my own money and that involved quite a lot of expense. Nearly nine hundred rupees had gone to pay fines. I was fined three times. There were many who, in the name of Congress, offered me financial assistance. I refused to accept it. Other Ashrams are maintained by subscriptions but that was forbidden in my ashram from the start. Once you accept subscriptions it becomes impossible to be impartial and courageous in your work and so difficult not to lose one's self-respect. My affairs had come almost to a standstill for want of money when I was informed that an allowance of seventy-five rupees a month had been granted me by the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Gandhiji seems to know everything. If I had not been given this allowance I would have had to use the income from the Ashram. And how much of an income does the Ashram have? Two ox carts are hired out. There are two oil presses, a fund

for cottage industries, washing soap is manufactured and we hold the agencies for several daily newspapers. This is the whole of it. The Ashram has never profited financially from bee-keeping and silk-worm farming. But the vegetables from the garden are sufficient for all the residents. To feed and clothe our volunteers is difficult nonetheless. If, on top of all that, my family expenses had to be met from the Ashram funds what would have happened to the library and how could we have run the weekly of the District Congress? The Ashram has no connection with the other expenses incurred by the Congress. This allowance saved me from a lot of worry. It never occurred to me that there might be anything demeaning in accepting it. I regarded it as a blessing from Mahatmaji. The name of the fund from which the allowance came did not trouble me nor did I wonder whether any millionaire had contributed to it or not. Mahatmaji had arranged for it to be granted me because I was one of his workers and I was in difficulty. And Nilu declared that he would not study in college because, if he did, he would have to take Gandhi Seva Sangh money! We all remembered what Mahatmaji had said to Jayaprakash's sister. Nobody could insist Both Bilu and his mother agreed with Nilu. No one looked at it from my point of view. I never realised before how deep the cleavage between me and my family is in certain respects I mistook the silent acquiescence of Bilu's mother for her consent This domestic conflict may also be the root cause of the boys' choosing different political paths. Nilu went to college. He didn't take a single copper coin from me. Bilu paid his expenses Relief work, after the Bihar earthquake, was given to Congressmen. Bilu was accountant for the district of Purnea. In that capacity he received an allowance of Rs. 30 a month. He spent it on Nilu's education. Nilu had no objection to taking the money from his brother. His objections were confined to taking money from me. I doubt whether I have ever received a crueler blow from anybody in my life. And yet I know for certain that Nilu will come to the top in any work he takes in hand except study And Bilu would never have been a success at anything else. How many students have passed through my hands' Don't I know? But Nilu, I just can't understand the meaning of your bearing witness against your brother.

I have nothing to say if you acted on instructions from your party. I'm also prepared to sacrifice everything if Mahatmaji demands it of me. But can any political party issue such instructions? The aims and objects of both Nilu's and Bilu's parties are the same though their methods differ. Can the consequences go so far? A party which depends upon public opinion for its support should take as its sole duty the task of explaining to the public the mistakes of other parties and, in pointing out these mistakes, draw people from erroneous ways into their own. Nilu, you have certainly misunderstood your instructions. You will have to pay for your mistake. It's true I don't follow your formulated logic but you should ask the leaders of your party whether the little that I do understand with my plain wit is right or wrong. And what does it matter now whether it is right or wrong? The harm had been done, the injustice. All your life this thing will pursue you. Little by little remorse will consume you. Your penance will never come to an end. What's this? Am I cursing my own son? No, Nilu, may God grant that you never realise what you have done. May what you thought your party instructions meant remain right for you. In nothing else will you be able to find support. You'll collapse if you once begin to doubt the justice of your reasoning, no matter how much strength you may think you have. I know what your brother meant to you.

"Mahasayaji.'

I raise my eyes and see Khedanlalji standing in front of me.

"Are you feeling sleepy?"

It's better for him not to sit down. He'll talk all sorts of nonsense if he does. The fellow can talk and talk and talk! He has three sons, Swaraj Prasad, Swatantra Prasad and Sangatan Prasad. Amazing names! Nilu and Bilu. The names of my boys are simple. Not much thought was taken over them. My father used to call Bilu, Balai. Balai gradually turned into Bilu. I don't think my father saw Nilu. No, father died the year Nilu was born. It's troublesome to find a suitable name for a child. Khedanlalji wrote a letter to his second son, Swatantra Prasad. He mentioned his other sons by name. The jail censor refused absolutely to pass the letter. He was convinced it transmitted some message by code. He's been quarrelling with the C.I.D.

ever since. He might have explained politely. But no, both parties cling stubbornly to their positions. He wrote a letter to his youngest son. The letter came back the day before yesterday as the result of their quarrel. One line in the letter read: 'It's not my fault that you have not heard from me. No owl's father will be able to stop this letter.' With the letter was a note from the Central Intelligence Department which ran: 'What the prisoner has written about his own father is suspicious. This letter has not been passed.'

What's this? Khedanlalji, are you getting up? He took a seat on my blanket only a moment ago. Is he leaving already? Is he offended? He has seated himself in Baidyanath's chair. Have the others gone to bed? Khedanlalji, Surajballi Babu, Haraharji, and Ramsaranji. They seem to be taking turns to sit with me, four at a time. Everybody seems to be awake. Is this why Baidyanath and his friends were sitting here so long? At last I understand what all the whispering between Sadasiu and Baidyanath was about. They want to keep watch on me. They're guarding me lest I do something. Who'll explain to them that I'm not as upset as they imagine? If I loved my son so very much would he have come to this? Where has Sadasiu gone? He was sitting on my cot. O, now I see, he's lain down on my bed. Perhaps he's drowsy. The mosquitoes are eating him up. I must get up and let the mosquito net down. "Why? Why? What's the matter? We'll fix the net. Sit down." the raised voices have wakened Sadasiu. He's most upset. I come back to my place on the blanket.

"Sit down, Surajballi Babu."

Surajballi seats himself on my blanket. I like him very much. He is of a naturally grave disposition. His only son was shot dead last August. The boy was ten years old. When his father was arrested a procession formed around him as he was led away to the police station. The child joined the crowd in order to see his father once more before he was shut up. His grandmother missed him and began to cry. His mother was sitting beside the window. The boy liked being in the crowd. His father's name was on the lips of thousands. "Jai, Surajballiji ki jai!" Everyone was praising his father. His father had announced the arrest of Mahatmaji that morning. Mahatmaji had held a meeting in Bombay. Surajballiji was arrested himself not

long after. His name was on every tongue. In his son's eyes he was as great as Mahatmaji. The boy was furious with the police. What were they going to do to his father? Talk of jail had frightened him once but his father had been taken to prison the year before too. That time garlands of marigolds were thrown around his neck. His grandmother had told him that anyone who did not help the English war with money and men or who agitated against it would be clubbed to death by the police. But he had seen the police inspector himself—such a great magistrate invite his father into his house for a meal. The inspector's wife asked him in too and offered him something to eat. And when his father had come home again after a couple of months he brought a box full of all sorts of things, soap, a pencil, a note-book with lines in it. He had made a knife out of the shaving blade his father brought. There had been a foreign-looking brush for cleaning the teeth in the box. The white bristles looked like his grandfather's head ten or twelve days after he had been shaved. A white cream that looked like milk boiled down to a paste was spread on the brush and rubbed over the teeth. His little sister, Dhankaniya, was so stupid she cried if the brush was run over her cheek. When he was very little his grandfather used to tease him by threatening to rub his beard into his cheek. It was like that. A vast crowd formed outside the wire fencing that surrounded the police station. It was difficult to see even the roof of the building. How could the child see his father! The crowd broke through the fence and entered the station yard. He was being slowly pushed forward by the pressure of people. "Surajballiji ki jai!" Why was everybody running towards the station? And then. . . .

The door of the lock-up was opened the evening of the next day and Surajballi Babu led out of the prison. I heard he was being taken to the Government hospital. Infinite was their mercy! They permitted him to see his son at the last. He was also allowed to stay at the cremation ground for a few hours. The boy's left leg had been amputated above the knee. The Civil Surgeon realised the boy would not live after the operation. When Surajballi Babu returned to the prison the following day, in the evening, I felt diffident about approaching him. What consolation could one offer to this grave silent man? I

went and sat beside him that day just as he has come to sit beside me today. "Sit down." After a long time he said, "The boy was conscious for a little while. He threw his arms around my neck and said, 'Uh, how hot the fever is, isn't it, Father?' All was over within two hours after that." Now, see. The corners of my eyes are wet. No, it's in sympathy with Surajballi Babu, not because I'm thinking of Bilu. Surajballi Babu's eyes are also wet. Tears are contagious. When one cries it is hard for others near him not to cry too. Haven't I the slightest self-control? Can't I stand anything at all? Mahatmaji, give me strength! Surajballi Babu is the only one who understands how I feel. His sympathy. . . .

Who's running this way? Along the veranda? Warder Singhji has come for the lantern. He picks it up from in front of the window. He is out of breath. Now he walks slowly away in another direction. A minute or two later the Assistant Jailor, Jafar Saheb, comes and stops in front of the door. He amuses us all by greeting us politely. He goes away without saying anything more. He is on his night round. An Assistant Jailor is on duty every night. That was why the warder came for the lantern.

Will they allow me to go to the cremation ground? Probably not. They would have informed me beforehand in that case. If they permit me to go I can see Bilu for the last time. What is there to see? I may not be able to look at him. No, no, his face is best as I remember it, so sweet and round. Let it dwell in my heart with its natural expression, familiar. What might I not see? But I can see Nilu if I am allowed to go out for a little while tomorrow. It's urgently necessary for me to see him! What a state he must be in! I'm afraid of what he might do. One is gone Only God knows what the fate of the other will be. What happens to me doesn't matter. Bilu's mother is the one I'm worried about. She has certainly stopped eating. It doesn't take long for anything to become known in a prison. She must have heard everything. She may even know about Nilu's giving evidence. How can she bear such a blow? She hasn't chosen politics. She's been drawn in by political friends, swept into it by a flood almost. Her natural inclinations centre in a home, replete with deep sweetness, shaped with her own hands, with the greatest of love and care. She wanted a home

inside the walls of which no noisy disturbance from the outside should enter, whose walls would firmly limit the great world beyond her experience, create certainty and clarity. I've dragged her away from that, out on to a thorny road which leads to an uncertain objective. She may not say anything but how can she bear this new affliction? There's a limit to what she can stand and she's put up with a great deal. Will they allow her to be present at the cremation? It'll be better if they do not. The authorities may not allow anyone to be present. They may take the corpse away in an army truck. The Superintendent may show us special consideration by asking Brahmin warders to carry out the cremation. Are armed police on guard all around the gaol tonight? They must be walking around the walls. A waste of labour. There's no need for such watchfulness. I don't know what the atmosphere is outside the jail but inside there is not a trace of resentment nor any sign of restlessness. It's just like any other day. There may be a crowd at the jail gate in the morning. Condolence meetings may be held in defiance of government orders. A strike in the town perhaps. But these things will not compensate me for my loss! Bilu's mother has no one to console her. Her younger sister lives in Brindavan but she has taken vows and is indifferent to the world. She scarcely knows her nephews. Bilu's uncle, his mother's brother, is a government official. He's not over-eager to acknowledge his kinship with us. He doesn't even send us Vijaya Greetings once a year. And now this on top of everything else! After this he'll be less willing than ever to know us. He'll be afraid for his job. Neither Nilu nor Bilu ever wanted to visit him. They went once, after they were grown-up. They came back quickly. We couldn't make out what had happened. Later we came to know that their uncle had said he considered me a perfect vagabond. They couldn't tolerate such an insult to their father. But it's true. What else am I? From his point of view? I have no sense of responsibility towards my family. I don't earn. I go about creating trouble. How can a careful man describe me except as a vagabond? Ordinarily we are considered to be a little unbalanced. When people want to show me some appreciation and consideration they say I'm a vagabond. The Vagrancy Act which used to exist in England could apply to us. Here in

India it's easy enough to start a bad livelihood case against us. In 1921-22 many prominent Congress leaders were sentenced in B.L. cases. Children are so sensitive and impetuous! I'd have laughed it off. As for Nilu, everyone in the house knows how much respect he shows me in his manner and his speech. But just let any outsider say anything! Will he get away with it? Yes, I must admit that Nilu still refrains from saying some things in my presence. He has never, up to the present, answered me rudely.

I must go and wash my face. My back and legs are aching from sitting still so long. Do people think of their own bodies willingly? The flesh forces itself on the attention. "What's the matter? Where are you going?" Seeing me get up Surajballi Babu is concerned.

"To the water tank," I answer, "for a wash."

The sound of an aeroplane is audible. They're passing all the time. How will a nation which is losing hundreds of lives every day in the war understand the value of a single life? To me Bilu is my son. To them? Can common justice always be expected in wartime? Today the ordinary citizen is no longer a man of flesh and blood with powers of reason and judgement, today he is an identity card, the number on a ration ticket. We needn't speak of the men who are doing the actual fighting, the soldiers. People everywhere have forgotten normal life. They used to look up when a plane passed but now nobody bothers to turn his head even if three dozen bombers pass in formation. Did people in Calcutta take the bombing of the city in the same unperturbed way? Were they not excited and anxious? Where can they find the time to think about Bilu? And why should the government be concerned about him if the public isn't? Bilu's party is right. Whose heart will you change? You can change a heart only if there is a heart to change. But it is also true that the more violent you become the fiercer is the counter violence you evoke. Do the people of the country have the strength to stand up to it? The keenness of our determination to achieve our object is measured by the amount of suffering and hardship we're prepared to undergo for it. Bilu and his friends do not understand this simple fact. Before one plunges he must be sure of his own strength.

I've washed my face and am wiping it with a towel. What's

this? Dasji is up. Have I awakened him with my splashing? No, it must be three o'clock. He gets up every day at three. Then he sits in a tub of water for half an hour, summer and winter. This water therapy tub was made at much expense in the jail factory. It looks something like an easy chair. He sits in it up to his neck in water and makes a sound with his mouth. It's the sound of water running out of a narrow spout. He hangs a bedsheet around the tub to curtain it off. When his bath is over he'll stand on his head in the correct yogic posture. He'll stand there, perfectly still, head down and feet in the air, for another half hour. I'm afraid that one of these days blood will gush out of his mouth and nose.

I'm back in my own place. Surajballi Babu is still here. What is Bilu doing now? Is he pacing up and down his cell? Is he overcome with anxiety and fear? Will he think of me? If only there were some way of knowing Bilu's last thoughts about me! He won't blame Nilu. He'll forgive him. I can swear it. Only God knows how he feels now. He may be half-mad. He may be rumpling and tearing his hair. He may be beating his head against the bars. He may be begging the warder to open the door, like a child. No, no, Bilu would never do anything like that. Not though his heart were ground to pieces. He will never show his suffering in his face To the last he'll maintain the dignity and honour of his ideal. He'll force a smile at the last, just to show the Superintendent. He may even joke with the Jailor. As he mounts the steps to the scaffold he may thank the officials present for executing him on such a beautiful morning with the morning star as witness. He'll never bring shame on his party or on himself by betraying weakness. My son, my eldest son! Don't I know him? Do people love him without reason? Hardar Dubey and his wife are crazy about Bilu, not to speak of Jiten's mother, Jathaima. Bilu loves to be petted. He's like one of the family in Jiten's house And in other less familiar places, wherever he finds sympathy and affection, he takes care to foster it and make it a permanent relationship. After the Holi festival he always goes to give his greetings and pay his respect. He sends lemons from the Ashram. Sometimes he arranges for a boy to attend school. He does no end of work of this kind. These ties of affection entail no obligations, they have no claims, they are not binding. They spring from

his need for tenderness. They're extras, additions to the affection he receives from his mother at home. That is what makes them so delightful. Nilu has no patience with such things. He's absorbed in his own ideas and accepts affection as his birthright. He doesn't know how to speak pleasantly. He thinks his own opinion infallible and tries to prove it on any and every occasion. How can Nilu waste time on all the small courtesies that repay the debt of affection? It gives him more pleasure to spend his time criticising them. Bilu casts a spell on people. He even enchanted my father. I shouldn't say it, because he has long since gone to heaven, but my father was bad-tempered. How often I've seen him sit down to eat and find the cooking not to his taste. At first he would grumble, then he'd exclaim, "A wretched diet!" bang his glass down and get up. Off he'd go to office without eating. Mother would sit at home without eating too. If the tea was not exactly right father would say, "What a lot of rot!" and throw the saucer after the cup. I remember many such little things. As he grew older his temper grew worse. Towards the end there were signs of derangement. He gradually lost the use of his legs. He was forced to leave Benares and move to Purnea. The more crippled he grew the angrier he became. When Bilu was born he spent all his time with the tiny boy. Father was unable to walk. He half reclined in an easy chair and refused to let his beloved Balai out of his sight. He declared any woman who came to visit us a witch who had come to cast a spell on Bilu. Bilu's mother had to put up with a lot of scolding. Towards the end, when he took to his bed, he was almost completely mad. I had a frame built around his bed to keep him from falling out. He lost his power of speech and lay with his eyes closed. His sense of touch diminished considerably. But his temper was as bad as ever. He tried us sorely with his scratching and pinching. When we fed him his rice he would bite down on our fingers But his anger vanished instantly whenever Bilu was beside him! Sometimes he rolled on the bed in a rage like a child throwing a tantrum but when I placed Bilu's small hands on his face he quietened at once like a charmed snake. Sometimes, when he was lying with his eyes closed, he would refuse to answer although we called him time and again. The more I pleaded with him the

stubborner he became. Then I would ask Bilu to call his grandfather. Even in his half-conscious state the old man would understand that it was Bilu who was calling him. His hands would grope for him. Then he would open his eyes and look at him. The day he died I whispered into his ear almost at the last, "Father, Balai is calling you. Balai!" I had a faint hope that he would respond to Bilu's name. But he was beyond the reach of any call. Bilu was astonishingly perceptive. How mature he was even then! He knew that no one else could control his grandfather. From the tone in which we called him he knew instantly that he was needed to pacify the old man or to persuade him to eat. He would assume a mock gravity or feign indifference. Perhaps he wanted his mother to pet him a little. Will Bilu see his grandfather again? Father, is this the way you claim your beloved Bilu?

I feel very restless. There're so many people in the room! All of them are awake. The warder is outside. Though the murmur of conversation dies down now and then it does not stop altogether. The sounds of Dasji's bath are audible. The room is somewhat cooler. A dog is barking somewhere. There's an oppressive foreboding in the air, in the sky, everywhere.

The light from the room falls outside, through the bars. Someone in a sari. Who is it? No, it's only the firewood that has been stacked there. The light, falling on the stack, created the illusion. Bisundeoji stocks firewood for the ward. I notice a tendency to collect things in all prisoners. Everything is kept, torn shirts, outworn sandals. Being in jail develops a desire to preserve things. Why should the woodpile make me see a vision? Make me mistake what I see? Kindling, firewood and rounds of dried cow dung are kept on the kitchen porch in the Ashram. Bilu's mother cooks inside. Bilu is to go somewhere. He is eating. He eats so quickly, without chewing at all. His hair is tousled. He is wearing jail clothes, a half-soiled pair of short pants with blue stripes and an undershirt. He looks thin and pale.

God! Gandhiji! Your names do not give me enough strength. I sit down again with my spinning wheel. This is my last resort, my rosary, my staff in my blindness. In Tibet people whirl a thing like the Yervada spinning wheel and recite the name of God. Surajballi Babu is looking at me anxiously.

I've just noticed. My face or my movements must certainly be showing something unwonted. The rolls of cotton are very poorly made. The thread keeps on breaking. The slightest illness makes people anxious in foreign countries. People long for their relatives. They crave the care of those near and dear to them. And on a day like this Bilu has no one with him! He may want to say many things. Bilu's mother stops eating whenever the boys have the slightest indisposition. She is at the patient's bedside day and night. Her fan never stops moving. And when the boy begins to convalesce she regulates his diet with the greatest care. Only a little curry made with bitter gourd is permitted the day after the fever has disappeared. The second day the patient gets bread and milk, and the day after that unleavened bread, rice on the day following. Nilu and Bilu both know what they are to expect if they have a touch of fever. But today I have brought them to such a pass that Bilu's mother will not be with Bilu in his last hour. Many animals devour their own offspring. Am I one of them? The thread has broken again. The thread must be very fine. It's breaking again and again. No, if the thread were any thicker it would be suitable for a carpet.

I've heard that in Nepal punishment can be undergone by proxy. Whether it's true or not I don't know but I've been told that rich people pay their servants to go to jail in their places. If such a custom existed here I could go instead of Bilu. . . .

There are so many stories of a person taking another's punishment upon himself. Babar did it for Humayun when the boy lay on his deathbed. What else is the meaning of taking hostages in war? A life for a life?

The thread has broken again. The cotton must be of a poor quality. How can I spin if the thread keeps on breaking all the time? I've used these rolls before and the thread has not broken. No, my hands and feet are shaking. I can't hold the roll steady or draw the thread out properly. My eye is also twitching. The thread looks indistinct. The oil in the lantern must be running out. How much longer can I expect to keep my eyesight? Am I still young? No, it's useless trying to deceive myself. It's impossible for me to spin in my present state. There's no historical foundation for the story of Sohrab

and Rustom. It's entirely fictitious. Could such a thing ever happen between father and son? Why not? Everything is possible! It's a common historical occurrence for a father and a son to fight over a throne. But what punishment is being inflicted upon me! The Sikh guru, Bandar, was punished. He had to slay his beloved son with his own hand. "Uh! What blood! Blood spurted in jets out of his breast."

"Did you say something?" asks Surajballi Babu.

"No, I didn't say anything." I feel embarrassed. Were my last words said out loud? Hesitantly Surajballi Babu suggests, "If you find spinning a little . . . a little . . . why not leave it now?"

"No, no, it's going quite well." I protest.

I feel as though I have been caught in the act of doing something wrong. My answer is mumbled. I get the words out somehow and am relieved to turn my attention to my thread again. I force myself to look steadily at the point at which the thread emerges from the rolled cotton, in order that no one can catch my eye. Tears are pushing through my eyes, bursting them. It must be because I have not slept all night. My eyes always burn when I keep awake. Mahatmaji! Give me strength. My self-control is giving way. I can't keep hold of myself any longer . . .

"Master Saheb! Master Saheb! O, Master Saheb!" Surajballi Babu is calling me.

The sound comes to me from a long way off. It's like the sound of a train passing distantly in a dream. I understand Surajballi Babu is calling me. But I do not feel like responding. Surajballi Babu has put his hand on my back. The touch makes me lose my self-control. "Bilu! Bilu!" I throw the roll of cotton aside and catch hold of his hands. Both of us are speechless. Tears are streaming from his eyes. The other four have left their chairs and come to us. Shame! What have I done? A crowd has collected. Quickly I release his hands. I try to go back to my spinning wheel. It's useless. I can't. Sadasiu has started fanning me. I thought he was asleep. Why has he got up again? What's the need of fanning a person who isn't sick? Do they think I am about to faint?

"A cool breeze is blowing," I say to Sadasiu, "You need not fan me any more." No one listens to me.

After a little while Surajballi Babu asks me very slowly, "I shall read from the Gita now. Will you listen?"

His words are full of emotion and sweet. I have no strength to refuse his request. "Read," I say.

I sit down once more with my spinning wheel. He has begun to read the Gita. I know why he wants to read the Gita in my presence. It is not to give me strength or sympathy nor even to drive away his own grief—it is to prevent me from hearing the sound of the military lorry in which the corpse will be taken away, the sound of the doctor's car, the magistrate's car. Whenever a hanging has taken place before we have waited for these sounds in terrified expectation. The shrill harsh horn of a car at such a moment tears one's nerves, suddenly, painfully. It's followed by such an appalling hush, a reign of silence in which one can hear the pounding of his heart in his chest. Time seems reluctant to move, the morning never comes. When the sound of the lorry is heard again people know the body is being taken away. The nine bells are sounded, to wake the prisoners up. On the night of an execution everybody stays up, yet no exception to the rule can be made. Two bells follow. It is the morning counting. The sound lets everybody know that the same number of prisoners are present in the morning as were locked up at the night before, no more, no less. Warders call out the numbers of prisoners in each ward in answer to the tower. The total is added up and compared to the night total. The unbelievable news is proclaimed by the two bells. The Jailor hands the keys to the Head Constable and the doors of all the wards are opened. The prisoners file out like lines of ants. "Double file! Double file!" Their sentences have decreased by a day. They exert themselves with fresh energy, to wipe away another unbearable, difficult-to-pass day. Every hour the prisoner is reminded that twenty-four hours make a day. A day has passed. So many days more are left.

They are trying to distract my attention. Is it possible to forget about Bilu now? Can I be absentminded even if I try? It would be a relief if I could. At this moment it is not possible to think of anything but one thing, even by the grace of God! If Bilu can think of anything but his impending execution he'll be spared much mental suffering. He may not even feel the pain. God, I've never asked you for any boon but now I'm going

to jettison all my good resolutions. I cannot resist speaking to you of what my heart craves. God, make it possible for Bilu to think of other things during his last moments! Let him not die little by little before the ultimate hour! Do not let him die of fear! Is telepathy true? Does what I think get through to Bilu? What I feel? See, Bilu, your father, see how he is debasing himself before God in his own eyes, for your sake, today!

Surajballi Babu is reading the Gita. I listen to the familiar words without hearing them and without understanding what I hear. The waves of sound impinge upon my ears but they find no response either in my brain or in my heart. It was only possible to listen to the Gita while standing on a battlefield of the Bronze Age. I am not Arjuna. Have we understood the true meaning of the Gita? Bilu, an atheist, who sent the Gita back, knows the essence of *karma yoga*. He spent himself in his work. And Nilu. In what way is he lesser? Nothing else mattered to him, not his beloved brother, public opinion, the claims of kinship or of affection - when he was confronted with what seemed to him to be his stern duty. And I think of them as atheists! Belief in God may strengthen our souls but disbelief in God has not made them weaklings! What brings ruin to others brings fulfilment to the *tantric*.

Ah! I've been startled again. The cotton has dropped from my hand. Over the hum of the spinning wheel and the monotonous recitation of the Gita rises the blare of a horn, a lorry horn. It subdues all other sounds. The crunch of brakes. The lorry has driven over my breast! If only I could hold on to it and drag it back! By the strength of my body! With all the force of my arms! It's dragging me along the gravel road. I block its wheels. Have I enough strength? The lorry stops. The engine pulses in unison with the pounding of my heart. It's the rasping of a cruel and furious beast. Sadasiu is gently stroking my back. They are all standing around me, the way people stand around a person who has just been run over. . . .

"Come," says Sadasiu, "let us all pray together." They sit down where they are. Baidyanath's group, the Forward Block group, the boy from the Kisan Sabha, the Communist, and all the rest! Meher Chand has begun to sing. Nobody objects to prayers today, no one mocks. When Meher Chand comes to the line he cannot remember everyone joins in to help him out.

He does not have to take the song book out of his pocket. They are all singing as loudly as they can. They hope the sound of the doctor's car and the sound of the magistrate's car will not be audible through the singing. That is why they are praying now. Meher Chand finishes and Sadasiu instantly starts:

"Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram . . . ."

Mahatmaji's favourite hymn. How sweet the tune is, always so fresh! Bilu's party members have no objection to its being sung today. The first song is a hymn to the national flag. This one isn't. They're relaxing their principles a little in order to try to distract the thoughts of Bilu's father at the last and to wish Bilu's soul well. Bilu's party will others not do anything? Perhaps Nilu would he have joined in the singing? Never. He'll break but not bend. Nilu and Bilu used to sing this hymn in the Ashram together, very nicely. They sang it for Gandhiji The singing now is unnaturally loud. They are trying to suppress their agitation. They're determined not to stop now they'll sing as long as they can Bilu is mounting the steps to the scaffold. Aha! he is barefoot and has stubbed a toe! How thin he is! His neck is as scrawny as a bird's. His nose is straight and sharp as a sword. Beneath him is darkness -the rope jerks Bilu! What will happen if Bilu goes? He's left so many Bilus behind him. God! Mahatmaji! Give his mother the strength to bear this blow! Give Nilu strength! Grant peace to Bilu's soul! The singing goes on:

"Raghupati raghava raja Ram,
Patita pavana Sita Ram,
Jai Radhanandana Jai Ghanashyama,
Janaki ballava Sitaram . . . ."

Louder! Still louder! !

WOMEN S WARD

MOTHER

Saraswati has gone away. It must be time to lock the door. Yes, so it is, I can hear Lucy the wardress talking. Saraswati was massaging me. How good it felt! Her fingers are very gentle and soft. She presses them lightly into my temples and draws them upward and inward, over my eyebrows, to the base of my nose. The throbbing in my temples stops at once. There is a solid, heavy mass inside my head, like a clot. It softens and dissolves under her fingers, growing lighter. If only Lucy had let her stay a little longer! Saraswati is a C Class prisoner. The consideration we get, little as it is is denied to her. C Class prisoners are kept in another ward. It's enough that she is allowed to stay with me as long as she is. Ah! Poor thing! I know why she has come to jail. Can she hide it from me? I'd have given my consent when Sahadeo's mother brought up the subject if I had known before. Bilu, Bilu might not have come to this. But why should I give my consent? God has so made me that I shall ruin everybody! "Seas dry up when an unlucky person looks at them." The saying fits me. Saraswati is unlucky too. It might not have been any different even if she had been married. I did not so much as ask Bilu about it. The girl isn't educated. How can she be a match for a modern boy? I hinted as much to Sahadeo's mother. She didn't answer me. She only gaped into my face with wide, astonished eyes. But Sahadeo did not forget to answer me later. "We are farming people," he said, "How can our sister be expected to win medals and become as learned as Sarojini Naidu or Vijaylakshmi Pundit? And what about Bilu Babu himself? Is he any more than a Shastri of the Vidyapith?" Sahadeo is a blinking devil, always as quiet as a cow thief. But when he does speak what he says hits home. Whose marriage is being discussed? The marriage of *my* son. It's for *me* to say whom he shall marry. He'll marry the girl I choose for him! I will not give my consent unless I wish to. Why should Sahadeo take that tone with me? They don't suit each other. How can a Bihari girl be a good match for a Bengali boy? Each in his own place is all right. Can one tree be grafted on another? Her

people do not even pronounce her name the way we do. I say Saraswati. They say Sarasoyati. Has she the slightest idea of how to cook a Bengali curry? Has she ever heard of *gokul pita*? Bilu doesn't like lentil soup made with *arahar* and the Biharis do not like any other kind. Only the women take soup made from *masuri* and that is when they are convalescing from childbirth. Once I made a curry with the succulent stems of the spinach called *danta* for Bahuriyaji. She put the stems into her mouth one by one, sucked them and spat them out. "I like *dantas* very much," she said. But she didn't know how to eat them! She didn't know they have to be chewed. And when they try to speak Bengali! They don't know how to make sweets. I've spent my whole life in this part of the country and I watch them here in the jail. There's nothing more for me to learn about them. The only sweet they can make is *puya*. They use it for everything, indiscriminately, on all occasions. All you have to do is mix a little flour and water, add molasses, fry it after a fashion and you have *puya*! It's not put in syrup or anything. They are put out if you cook a curry with more than one or two kinds of vegetables in it. To marry Bilu to one of them! It's not a matter of a day or two. How can a Bengali live on garlic and pepper all his life? But I do like Saraswati very, very much. I can be fond of her without wanting her to be my daughter-in-law. I've watched her grow up. She comes to stay in the Ashram often, with her brother Kapildeo. Saraswati and Sahadeo are like my own children to me, Bilu and Nilu. In a sense I've brought them up. How old can she be? Not so very long ago she was a child.

She was mischievous and lively. One day she was swinging herself around a bamboo post on the kitchen porch. She was dressed in a Brindavan sari dyed yellow with the stems of sephali flowers. She swirled from left to right and back again, careless of her loosened hair, her sari, her person! I told her to stop, that she would get dizzy and be sick. She wouldn't listen. Bilu came up to the porch, reciting a little rhyme:

'Saraswati at school!
Saraswati at school!
The teachers are bad,
Very, very, bad!'

The girl kept on swinging herself, retorting as she spun around the post:

'Meow, meow, meow, meow, koo!
Thank you, Brother Cat!'

Bilu answered in the same way:

"Didn't you eat the chicken,
Drumsticks and all?"

She stopped then, laughing and flopping about the porch.
The girl has a fine figure. She could have managed the work. How can any Bengali girl manage the work of a Congress Ashram? It's more a hotel than anything else. Even litigious people who come to the district town to attend to their lawsuits in the courts stay at the Ashram. And there are meetings all the time. No hour is untimely. People come and go all the twenty-four hours. There's no difference between day and night. Anybody else but me would have cried herself to death. But Bilu would never get a proper meal from Saraswati. He likes vegetables. He sits there, taking small bites, pecking at his food. He eats more vegetables than rice. He manages to keep his bones together with that. Without vegetables he eats no more than a bird. Three or four grains of rice satisfy him. And Saraswati! Neither she nor her people are in the habit of eating vegetables. Only a millionaire among them has more than one or two curries and then it is the talk of the neighbourhood. Ordinarily they heap red rice on a brass platter with a rim and make a hollow in the middle. Into the hollow they pour a dipper of thick *dhal* soup. A dab of vegetable curry is put on one side, a dab no bigger than a dab of sandalwood paste. They eat that gratefully. Sahadeo and Kapildeo both drink a whole pot of water.

Who's that? Why are they pulling at my legs again? Who are you? Manchaniya? Who told you to put oil on my legs? It must have been Bahuriyaji. They've gone to listen to the reading of the Ramayana and sent this poor creature to bother me! The reading is going well. Bahuriyaji reads. The other seventeen repeat the refrain with her, mingling their voices.

It's a plague to my ears. With us it's the custom for only one to read and for others to listen quietly. Listeners do not do more than murmur appreciatively. Everything about these people is odd. "Now, Manchaniya, who told you to rub oil on my legs?"

"Saraswatiji told me your legs and your arms are aching. You haven't eaten anything for days. She told me to rub oil into the soles of your feet and the palms of your hands to relieve your pain. I'm afraid to annoy you. I was sitting at the door when Saraswatiji went out. The wardress came up and scolded me. 'You're half asleep already,' she said, 'You've been told to look after the Maiji. Why are you sitting here? You're to keep awake the first half of the night. Golok will keep awake the second half.' Off she bustled. I have to do what I'm told, as long as I am here, because the Government has put me in jail. Certainly I have sinned greatly. If it were not so how could I, a Brahmin girl, be asked to massage other people's feet? I obey my orders by massaging you. And you, Maiji, do not like it."

Manchaniya is about thirty. She's an ordinary C Class prisoner. She was widowed as a child. She's good-looking. Some time ago she gave birth to a baby. The dead body of the child was found in an earthen pot in a bamboo clump. There were finger marks on its throat. Aha! Butter-soft throat! All blue with congested blood! Such a small bundle of flesh! Manchaniya has been given ten years and her mother two. Good! Serves her right! She became a mother. She bore a son in her womb. The child had not even learned to cry. And she, the mother, did that to it? Mothers like her ought to have thorns thrust under their knees and piled on their heads and be roasted over a husk fire. No, she could never have done it herself! She must have been unconscious, in a faint. It's her mother who did it. Her mother is a wicked woman. And she's got only two years! Is anything right with their laws or their justice? Would my Bilu have been given such a savage sentence if there were? He hasn't murdered anybody. He hasn't even assaulted anybody. All he has done is to work for the Congress. Send him to jail for it! Fine him for it! But the gallows? God, how can such injustice be endured?

"Maiji, let me put a little oil and water into the palms of your hands." Oh! Don't bother me any more. Can't you leave

me alone? A wound on the head drives a dog mad. I'm grieving myself to death. And everybody conspires to make a game of me. Don't pull me about any more! Give me a little peace! Thirty-six people around me all the twenty-four hours! They sit around me and hold a festival. It's as though I'd been laid on my bier beneath the sacred basil. When I saw them sitting down to read the Ramayana I hoped to have a little respite. But no, this thing starts her croaking! Manchaniya is saying, "Maiji, the doctor came when you fainted this morning. He said you'll be fed by force tomorrow if you don't eat something. You've been fasting three days now. He'll give you an injection and run a tube down your nose to make you eat chicken eggs."

"Yes, my dear, yes. It's my food that's important, isn't it? Who can make me eat against my will?"

"You don't know these people, old Maiji. Have you seen the bag in which Narmada Ben ties up her bedding? They have a leather thing like that and strap you down to the bed with it. Two or three of the wardresses take hold of you together and force you to lie down. Then they tie you to the mattress just like bedclothes."

"Ah, no one can force me to swallow. Go away! Don't talk any more."

Manchaniya is not to be deterred. She keeps on talking, saying what she likes. "There's that Dome woman, Harin Maghaiya. She has a sore in her nose you know. It bleeds now and then. Last year, before you came here, she went on hunger strike because she had been assigned to the latrine cleaner's squad. She claims to be a descendant of Raja Harish Chandra. Her family has great prestige in her own caste. How can she be made to clean filth? People of her caste do not touch dead bodies nor do they accept food from drain-sweepers. The cleaning work in this jail has always been done by Santhal women. She was forced to swallow a drink made with chicken eggs. But what good did it do? She began to vomit. The doctors did not even tell her what she was being given. Her instincts are strong. The government had to give in. The Saheb issued orders to take her off the latrine squad. Mahatmaji cannot get the better of the Government but she made it climb down in a couple of days. Colster Saheb came and scolded the

Superintendent roundly. The wardress who is the wife of a *chamar* told me about it. The Dome woman won but her nose has bled ever since."

Does blood gush out of the nose and mouth of a person when he's hanged? One might ask Manchaniya. She should know. When she throttled her child did blood gush out of its nose and mouth? No, a mother cannot ask a mother such questions. If she did do it herself she cannot have looked.

What happened to Durga's little boy? He was in my lap when the end came. The fever had worn him to the bone. His tummy was pinched and his frame gaunt. Durga's mother sent for me suddenly. I took the pot off the fire and hurried to their house. Durga's mother is so weak-minded anything frightens her. Her wailing and shrieking had already upset the whole neighbourhood But the call of God had come to the tiny child. Would she sit beside him quietly for a minute or two? No. She cried that she could not, that she was terribly afraid. I found Durga sitting with him. She was numb with terror. The child might die at any moment. I took him into my lap. There was a rattling in his throat. The white of his eyes was showing. He was fighting for breath with all his strength. His face and feet were livid with exertion. How hard he struggled! How hard! How small he was! Then it was over, there, in my lap. Not a drop of water went down his throat, not to speak of medicine. The strangest thing of all was that blood ran out of his nose and mouth. My clothes were wet through. I never saw anything like it. Durga's mother disturbed the whole house with her shrieking. Durga sat there woodenly. Tepi's mother plied her with questions. 'Now, Durga, did he eat the papaya and palm sugar this morning?'

When Bilu was born he was sweet and plump, a big baby who filled my lap. The wife of the Head Pundit came to see him while I was still in the confinement room. The nurse Rukmini put a dab of soot on the baby's cheek. 'You don't know the wives of these pundits,' she said, 'they're worse than witches. Their eyes are so evil everything they look at withers. The baby will get smaller and smaller from day to day and shrivel up altogether if I don't put soot on his cheek. He'll grow thin as string.'

The old nurse was after me all day and all night. I was not

to do this. I was not to do that. She warned me whenever I moved, whenever I sat up. Well! All right! She had her way. Bilu was born on the Dasami day. The Head Pundit's wife came to see him after the holidays. She refused to believe that Bilu was only twenty days old. How she stared at his plump little legs and arms! Rukmini the nurse muttered sourly and covered them at once.

Bilu's health was ruined by that attack of double pneumonia. He was about two and a half years old. My father-in-law was an invalid. He was losing the use of his feet when Bilu was taken sick. From November to November, two years, Aghran, Poush, Magh, Phalgun, Chait - two years five months — Bilu was two years five months old. I can't calculate days and months easily. If Tepi's mother were here she would be sure to find something wrong with my counting. It's impossible to say anything in front of her. She never lets a word pass. I was worried from the very first day when I found Bilu's forehead burning. He cried the whole night. How restless he was! And what angry abuse poured out of the next room, from my father-in-law! The boy simply could not be kept quiet. His father said he would call Doctor Haragovind in the morning. My father-in-law was furious. Driven by his railing Bilu's father sent for the doctor immediately. The doctor replied that he could not come that night. My father-in-law was even more furious. He threatened to report the doctor to the government and have his practice stopped. The doctor played dice until one o'clock at Sitapati's shop and refused to attend a patient who might be dying! It was not the winter season nor the monsoon. "They're assassins," he cried "They're robbers, thieves, thugs, not doctors." My father-in-law was bedridden. I put pen, ink paper, spectacles and a lantern beside him, all he needed to write his report, in order to quieten him. And I sent Nanku, the school watchman, to the doctor once more. Nanku drove Ali Baksh's carriage himself that night and came back with the doctor! Nanku, leaning on a cane, still comes to see me sometimes, at the Ashram. I understood Bilu's condition was serious from the way Dr. Haragovind crooked his face. A tug of war ensued, life and death pulling by turns. It lasted for days. Once the end almost came. I learned the virtue of musk. Bilu's hands and feet were going cold. Haragovind

counted his pulse and sat there with a miserable expression. What a glow the medicine brought! The boy's feet grew warm and damp almost immediately. He began to perspire. The sheet and pillow were quickly soaked. The limp child could scarcely be kept dry. His chest and back were weighed down under poultices. As he left in the morning the doctor said, "I've given your son a new life." It was no exaggeration at all. God be praised for Dr. Haragovind! But the boy was restless and his body hot for a month after he had been given the musk. Arrangements were made for a ceiling fan. It was kept revolving the whole night. Bilu slowly recovered. But did he ever get his former strength back? He never put on weight and he was always sickly. In a wealthy family he would have been kept as delicately as a grape in a box, surrounded with care and attention. Such attention, such care, such food and clothing he never had, not for a day. He was born with his luck! Why did Haragovind save him? Why was he allowed to grow so big? God, if you wished to take him, why didn't you take him then? Why did you permit my love for him, my ambition for him, to grow so? And why did you decide to take him at last in such a devilish way? How is it that such an affliction has come to me? I must be wicked to deserve it. God, you should punish me only. Let me suffer for my sins. Punish me in any way you like. Why should Bilu suffer? If I'd lost him when he was small it might have been possible, after Nilu was born, to find some comfort. Now there are thousands of him to remember, not one. He said thousands of things, did thousands of things, and had so many ways of looking at me. He's a thousand in one. Too many memories, incidents, tears and so much laughter, so much playful wheedling oh! it all floats before my eyes! It's beyond measure. I long to live with these memories, to clasp them to my heart, to hide them away, keep them safe. Bilu shall find a sanctuary within me, I'll be able to fondle him, to touch him with my hands, to draw him to me. I'll never let him go. Who can drag a son from his mother's arms?

The reading of the Ramayana is over. Their voices rose shrilly at the close and brought their evening service to an end. How high-pitched their voices are! I've heard them every day since I've been in prison and I'm sick and tired of them. Thirty

days a month!

They're still singing. I can't make out the words. Now they're starting all over again. They end with a loud cry that splits the room, clap their hands and bow to the ground. Now they're getting up. Lucy and Chamain, the two wardresses, sit with folded hands on the verandah outside, near the place where the reading is held.

Lucy is a Santhal Christian. Does the name of God recognise caste restrictions? She is very devout. She has one of the refrains by heart. She joins the others loudly whenever it comes round Garurji has the strongest voice. She can always be heard above the others. Garurji's real name is Sandhya Devi. Her nose is exactly like the fabulous bird's. So everybody calls her Garurji, teasing her. No one even remembers her real name any more. Even the wardresses call her Garurji. At first it made her angry but now she has grown accustomed to it. But what a scene it created the other day when Lucy took a sari out of the wardrobe room in her name. Garurji 1 sari. The entry was discovered in the ledger where a record is kept of all articles issued. Where was poor Garurji to hide? She cried and cried and even went on a hunger strike. She wrote a letter to the Jailor Saheb complaining that Lucy had insulted her. She also disclosed that Lucy sells cigarettes and tobacco to the prisoners. Lucy was much embarrassed. The Jailor Saheb came and made Lucy apologise to her. That soothed her feelings but it did not change her name.

When Bilu was small he used to read the Ramayana to us, during the summer when classes are held in the morning. In all the heat of the noon Tepi's mother, Jiten's mother and Durga's mother would come to the Ashram to hear him. Bilu liked reading the Mahabharata. He didn't enjoy the Ramayana so much But Jiten's mother would start teasing him as soon as she entered the room. "O you! You're a Brahmin's son!" she'd say, "I've told you we're not devout, haven't I? We don't want to hear Kasiram Das. Bring out the Ramayana. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two different things."

"Let me finish this part, Aunt Jathaima," Bilu says, rocking back and forth as he reads. His eyes filled. Tears spring to his eyes every time he reads that line. Tepi's mother cut him short with affectionate mockery, "Ah! He weeps at everything. I

suppose it's because he was born on Dasami day." It's true his eyes fill with tears very easily whenever he reads. We were old women, the mothers of children, women who observed *Shasti* Tuesday. We were the ones who should have been moved to tears during the reading of the scriptures. But no tears came to our old burnt-out eyes! Bilu turned his face away, drying his eyes secretly, but Nilu, lying on his stomach not far away, saw him. "Look, Mother," he cried, "See what Dada's doing!" Jiten's mother would scold him into silence. "The broken pot in the corner," she said, "thinks it knows everything. Keep quiet, will you?" But Nilu could not be stopped. He would laugh, shout, set the house by the ears. Nanku had the Mahabharata rebound by the school bookbinder. On the flyleaf were scrawled a couple of lines in Nilu's handwriting, "Khoda is the Lord, Mother. I am rebuking you. Nilu." He had to show off his foreign learning even on the flyleaf of the Mahabharata. "Bilu ought to have a pigtail now," Durga's mother said. "How prettily it would bob up and down as he reads! O you rebellious Brahmin, must you rock about more than you read? Do you hear?" Bilu was overcome with embarrassment. He couldn't look at them. Nilu began to shout, "I'll take you by your pigtail and send you flying to Burdwan!" Jiten's mother put in a word. "Yes, my dear child," she said, "it's time for Bilu's sacred thread ceremony."

Yes, Bilu was devout as a child. His veneration for the gods and goddesses was deep and genuine. But when he grew up all his piety evaporated like a camphor ball. It was the same with Nilu. For some time after this incident Bilu acted as though his life depended upon his sacred thread ceremony. He spoke of it in and out of season. "You don't want me to have it," he would say, "It ought to have been given to me when I was nine years old. There's not more than a couple of auspicious days this year for it." After he had received his thread he sat down regularly every evening to recite the *gayatri* mantra. For a long time he refused to talk during a meal, ate no bazar food and refused all invitations to dine out. How fastidious and discriminating he was! And he was fond of ritual. He knew many of the sacred verses by heart. He could recite all the names of Krishna fluently at the age of four and the *devi sureswari bhagavati gange*. Even a year before he

took the sacred thread he was like that. I was in the kitchen and the two boys were scrambling around on the bed, playing with a bolster. They were enacting the breaking of Durjodhan's thigh. Bilu cried out suddenly, "Mother, Mother, come quick!" What had happened? Had an arm or leg really been broken? Was it a snake or a centipede? My heart pounded. The pan of vegetables stayed on the stove. I ran wildly into the room. Nilu was sitting on the bed, very still, as people sit while a barber cuts their hair. Bilu was sitting with his arms around Nilu, holding him. Both of them were numb with fear. Bilu was covering something just above Nilu's elbow with his hand. When I came up he showed me what it was. Nilu wore a charm from Purneswari, a bead made out of a *rudraksha* berry, and a *hartaki* seed, on a string around his arm. The string had broken. The boys knew that no step should be taken without this charm. To do so would bring Nilu certain misfortune. "Mother, bring another string quickly!" The charm was tied above his elbow once more. Only then did the two little heroes climb down off the bed.

When Mahatmaji was travelling through this part of the country, two naked little boys, covered with dust and mud, suddenly appeared on the Manshahi bridge just as our car turned into it. The sight of the car frightened them. Unable to decide what to do they ran from one side of the road to the other. Then they threw their arms around each other and lay down in the middle. By the grace of God they were saved! But when I got out of the car to pick them up they were blue with terror. They dared not open their eyes. The thought of those two boys, brothers, Nilu and Bilu, that day, still makes the tears start to my eyes. My heart did not calm down until I had them safely back at home. What a terrible thing almost happened! I always, whenever I think of the boys, see the two helpless little figures covered with dust and mud.

God! Nilu and Bilu trusted in you so much! They had such strong faith! Why did you take it away? The first time that Bilu did not appear for the evening *kirtan* I assumed he had a headache. I asked him if he was not feeling well. I put my hand on his forehead to see if he was running a temperature. What was the matter? When I at last understood I beat my breast in sorrow. If such a change could take place in Bilu

anything could happen! Everything was possible. Nilu had discarded his sacred thread but that was not so serious. We could make light of it. Nilu is headstrong; he does whatever comes into his head. I smile when I watch him. He's my father-in-law, come back to bully me some more. Child, you were born out of me, not me out of you! Who can know you better than I do? You'll have forgotten all about your anger by tomorrow. I've known your obstinate ways ever since you were a baby! When he was small Nilu bowed to the ground whenever his foot touched a paper bag from the grocer's. He used to come and solemnly confess when he stepped over the almanac by mistake What a face he used to make about it! He wanted me to say that what is done unwittingly is not a sin. One night I'd finished the cooking and was boiling some silk cocoons when Bilu called me, "Mother, see what Nilu has done!" The boys had just finished their examinations. They were through with study. I wondered what new escapade Nilu had thought of! I found the framed icon of the goddess Saraswati on the floor. Nilu had taken it off the wall and piled all the shoes in the house on top of it I was amazed! How could Nilu do such a thing? He had bowed to the ground before this very icon and before me every morning during his examinations when he set out for the school hall. This was the icon we worshipped at the sacred festival of Saraswati! Sandalwood paste was still on it O, what a rascal! What had come over him, making him so bad? Bilu explained that Nilu had done it out of chagrin. He had failed in arithmetic. What a temper the boy has! He failed in arithmetic Why should he desecrate the icon because of that? He had played the year away instead of attending to his studies. Why shouldn't he fail? How many times I'd told him to sit down with his Father and let him explain the problems! He always answered, "Why should I make up to the goddess if I have to study in order to pass? What're the gods for if a boy can't pass without studying?" And off he'd go to mope in a corner. Bilu took the shoes off the icon, wiped it carefully with a cloth dipped in holy Ganges water and hung it up on the wall again. I took five copper coins and touched the icon with them, one by one. Later, when Nilu had got over his anger, I asked him to make an offering with them. Nilu's pranks were not worth taking any notice of. But

when Bilu stopped going to *kirtan* and lost his faith in the gods I really became worried. He had trusted in them implicitly. On days sacred to Lakshmi he used to ask me to paint her footprints on his tops and his marbles. How could he get as many tops and marbles as he wanted unless I did it? And Bilu changed – in front of my eyes! "God! What have you done to Bilu?" The question pricks my heart all the time. How I tried to keep his father from knowing! But how long could I conceal the fact that the boy refused to participate in the *kirtan*? I put a few drops of water made holy by the feet of Purneswari into Bilu's drinking water secretly. And I added a few drops of the water in which her sword was washed as well. I prayed to her not to blame the boy. And what about him? You, you, the father of the boys? You ought to talk to the boys when they make mistakes, explain things to them. They cannot be stubborn with you! No, he, he won't say anything. The welfare of the boys seems to be my sole concern. He's a strange sort!

Now then. Here they are again, come to disturb me. Oh dear, she thinks she knows all about taking a pulse, doesn't she? Don't I know? She pretends she knows something about medicine because her husband is the District Board doctor. But why? My husband was a teacher. It never occurred to me to consider myself learned just because I was his wife! He knows all about the Congress. How much do I understand?

Kamala Devi asks, "How are you now?" Anger flames through me. Why does she make such a fuss? She's concerned for me, that I know. I answer, "It'll be a long time yet before what you're thinking of will happen. Do you imagine that I have been born lucky enough to be able to hop unceremoniously into heaven? My time would have come long ago if I had. I'll finish the whole family before I go!"

Kamala Devi has forgotten to count my pulse. Her fingers have loosened. My arm drops back upon the bed. It feels prickly and numb. Uh! I'm done. I'm done. How my arm pains! The back of my head and behind my left ear, inside my head, is paralysed, numb. When I try to lift my head from the pillow it rolls a little to the left and drops back. There is a continuous ringing in my ears, like the droning of a cricket. I've told Kamala Devi a few things plainly. Let her keep her

officiousness for the ones who listen to the Ramayana! They gulp down what she says admiringly, without really hearing a word. Most of them neither know or understand anything. The other day I made a cup of tea for Anusuwaji. "I've a cold," she said. "Will you make me a cup of tea with ginger and salt?" She poured the tea into her brass pot and drank it from the pot as water is drunk, without touching her lips to the rim. She burnt her mouth and tongue badly! A person who doesn't know how to drink tea should not boast about her education. All of them are the same. And that Sarala Devi! If only she had some brains! Her father lives in Burahiyadhan village in Rupouli thana. The village is, I've heard, a large one. When she was trying to impress me with its size she said, "Magistrates and judges, the police and a sanitary inspector visit it. Even the dogs have grown accustomed to their comings and goings; they don't bark any more when a person wearing short pants appears. It's a very progressive village." A blessed country hers is and blessed are her wits! Kamala Devi likes to form cliques among these people, busybody that she is! Kamala Devi is a member of the Assembly, you know. She can't speak English. What can she do in the Assembly except raise her hand? Narmada Behn told me the other day that Kamala Behn doesn't want any educated woman to join the Bihar Congress. She would lose her position in that case. So she intrigues among the ignorant and stupid. It may be true. She calls milk powder 'white woman's milk.' She doesn't allow anyone here to eat tinned butter. She claims it contains eggs. How else could it be yellow? Who has time to waste arguing with her?

Why, what's this? Kamala Devi is sobbing. Shame! Shame! What have I done? I sit up and take hold of her hands.

"Kamala, I'm your mother's age. Don't mind my scolding. I'm wrong. Am I myself now? I'm not in my right senses. I've said something without thinking." I stroke her head. She wipes her eyes and tries to smile.

"Have you forgiven me?" I ask.

"What things you say! Lie down for a little now."

She forces me to lie down again. Her concern shows in

her face and eyes. She is like a daughter caring for her mother. I have no daughter. Nilu and Bilu are all I have. If only I had a girl! Can a boy take a girl's place? Sometimes I've played at pretending that Nilu is my son and Bilu my daughter. Bilu is as gentle as a girl by disposition. His manner is just as full of care and concern. His eyes moisten in the same way. Just see, how harshly I spoke to Kamala Devi! Was she in the least annoyed? She might have answered back. Her tongue is not a soft one. The other day she drove the Assistant Jailor in charge of the Supplies Godown to tears. How much everybody in this ward loves me, cares for me, worries about me! And I scold them, saying all sorts of things, good and bad. I've never been like this before. No one has ever been able to drag me into a quarrel. Jail seems to have changed me. I cannot restrain either my tongue or my feelings any more. Kamala's fanning me.

"Wouldn't you like a cool drink, a drink made with a little rock sugar?" she asks. "Just a sip? No?"

"No!" I've been nice and she immediately takes advantage of it. I don't know what to do with these people! I'll eat of my own accord when I feel like it. No one need coax or flatter me. Lucy the wardress told me the day before yesterday that the doctor left orders for food to be kept beside my bed all day and all night. No one can predict when I'll feel hungry. They amuse me and at the same time made me sad. My fast is to them just like the fasting of Harin Maghaiya Dome! I'm a Brahmin, brought up on monthly vows. Women like me are in the habit of fasting. Not to eat for a day or two entails no suffering.

The bell is ringing in the ward. Who's come so late at night? The wardress locks the ward and climbs over the wall to give the key to the jailor. The outer door of the ward is kept closed day and night, closed from inside. If anyone has something to say he pulls a cord outside and rings a bell inside. Lucy is talking to somebody. Is anything wrong again? Lucy herself is not a minor affliction. She spends the day going around the prison, making friends with all the warders. And when I said, "If I cook a curry will you take it to Bilu in his cell?" her eyes grew big and round as she answered. "How can I possibly do that? It's not permissible to take anything to his cell. Watch

is kept there day and night. How can I keep my job if I attempt to do a thing like that?" How very, very honest she is, as honest as Yuddhisthir himself! She talks of charity, she, a person who spends her life devouring people! Oh, you, you, you're afraid of the warders? You joke, laugh and flirt with them all the time. But when I ask you to do something you have eighty excuses! You're a mother too. If you don't understand how I feel how can others be blamed for not understanding? God grant that luck like mine may never be yours! You'll understand if it does come to you. Day before yesterday you came up to me, grinning with all your thirty-six teeth, and told me that a meal had been cooked for my son specially, separately, that he had been given potato curry. A real piece of news surely! What a precious thing they gave him! The Government threw open the doors of its treasury and gave away its riches! She simply melted with pleasure as she told me.

"Kamala Devi!" Lucy is calling her from outside

"What is it? Who has come?"

"The doctor on night duty. He is asking how the Bengali Maiji is. If anything goes wrong send word to the hospital. And if she faints he said to hold the green bottle to her nose. Manchaniya and Galakati, remember! Both of you are asleep, aren't you?"

What concern! The doctor and Lucy both! Don't I know them? Oh, you, I know you through and through. You say one thing when you mean another. It's the same from top to bottom. Take the police inspector. He put a lock on the Congress office the day Bilu's father was arrested. And to me he said, "Mother, you may stay on. It's your own house. Government hasn't taken it over. Only the Congress office has been sealed." Three or four days later he came and arrested me. I was taken to the police station. He said I was to be held in detention like the Mastai Saheb. They were very polite at the police station. The inspector's wife made arrangements for my evening prayers. I told my beads at her house. Both of them, husband and wife, called me mother in an eager and affectionate manner. The wife is really lovely. She put her baby into my lap and said, "Please give him your blessing for a long life! Such a job this is! Our countrymen curse us. Open

your heart, Mother, and bless the child! Two, one after the other, have already left us, emptying my lap."

"My child! Good people do not curse anybody. Don't I have children of my own? This babe will shine like a light in your home. Do you know the Baharam shrine? Near the Purneswari temple? The god is very efficacious, very much awake. Write your son's name on a brick and hang it on the tree there." That chapter closed. When I arrived at the prison I was told that the inspector had reported that I had unlawfully entered Congress property, ousting the government. A case was, it seems, being drawn up against me on this charge. Just see! What a thing to do! How can people lie like that while the sun and moon are still in the sky? The inspector himself told me that I could continue to reside in my own house, that the government had not sealed it! And then he entered a complaint against me!

The jail doctor is very much like the inspector. He gives red and blue water to prisoners to cure illnesses in order that they can be hanged! It's the way Mohammedans raise chickens! And he calls me Mother! That leaves me no way to relieve my feelings by saying a hard word or two. I am mother to the whole country, mother to every Congress worker in the district, I have sons all over the world. But my heart aches for my very own two, Bilu and Nilu. I don't really want to be anybody else's mother. I've not been able to love these two enough – if I had would Bilu crave affection the way he does? Would he call Jathaima 'Mother'? Would Nilu be so fond of her? I want Nilu and Bilu to be mine, my very, very own, mine for myself! No one else should have any claim to them! But what good does it do to cling to them? Everybody claims them. The whole country wants them. Can I hold them back? Bilu is so sensitive, so easily hurt! The slightest trace of coldness in my tone when I speak to him makes the tears spring to his eyes. One day at lunch his father remarked, "Where is the great Bilu, the head of the house? I can't see him. Hasn't he come in yet?" Bilu was in the next room. How upset he was! Nilu would have split the house open. Jathaima, you have your own children, Jiten, Dhiren, Hoblu, Bela, your daughter-in-law and grandchildren. Your family is growing and prosperous, by the grace of the goddess Lakshmi. You lack for nothing. Why

should you take Bilu away from me? I'm not going to share my son with anybody! Why do you try to estrange him? I've nothing in the world except Nilu and Bilu. No roof, no hearth, not a place to put my head! No money. No property. I have looked into the faces of my sons and forgotten everything else, all my sorrow and all my trouble. But God was jealous. The sight of it roused his envy. An evil spell was cast on Bilu, a spell that made him turn away from me. Jathaima seems to be a good woman but she is not; at heart, straightforward. Just let any other woman have a piece of jewelry made! She'll inspect it minutely and discuss it in a hundred different ways. She has to know every detail. Is the way the gold has been turned really like gold? How much alloy has been added to it? Which jeweller made it? How heavy is it? How much did he charge for making it? How could it be made nicely so cheaply? And she pries into all our family affairs by asking Nilu and Bilu questions. Does your mother fry her spices in vegetable oil or *ghee*? Does your mother fry egg-plants in deep fat or just brown them? When the boys were small she was always asking such things. Now tell me! Why does she want to know? Bilu is reserved by nature. He never said anything. But Nilu would come home and report everything, imitating her. It was so amusing! I'd laugh and laugh. Her voice exactly, her manner. But ought she to do it? My family is a poor one. You, Jathaima, are like one of us. Must you talk about our poverty? Oh, yes, I know she does a great deal for us. She looks after us when we are sick, finds excuses to serve us delicacies - so much, more than one can mention. Nilu is living with them now. She does everything for us but she makes us feel it. She's too fond of pleasantry and not at all dignified. Her manner is bantering. She calls Bilu the 'Brahmin's son' and Nilu the 'Fish-eater'. She calls their father the 'Beard'. What harm would it do for her to call them by their names in a plain, straightforward way, instead of being flippant? When I was young a small casket came into fashion that had a face on the lid. Her face is exactly like that face. Her teeth are as black as cucumber seeds. She carries a lump of tobacco in her cheek and is always spitting! She's the daughter of a Brahmin priest. Oh, you, you grew up on bananas and raw rice left over from the offering! Until the

age of twelve you never had any clothes but the red-bordered ones a priest receives. Marrying into a rich family has turned your head! You don't walk on the ground any more! It's as though you've seen a five-legged snake. God has been generous to you. You have much. You ought to regard those less lucky as human at least. I wasn't born into a family as poor as yours nor was I married into one. It's my misfortune that everything I touch turns to dust, every handful of gold. Why weren't you satisfied with Bilu's calling you Auntie? No, no, I'm not really angry with you, not at all. Nilu and Bilu have had a little pleasure because of you. You've enabled them to satisfy a few of their cravings You gave them shelter when their father was in prison and they had no place to go Will you grieve less than I when Bilu goes? I know. I know. If I could give Bilu to you from my heart, would you be able to save him? I'll not grudge you a share in him. Let him live! Only let him live! All you have left is memory. I have no more. That will have to suffice for the rest of my life. I'll never forget your affection, your consideration My sons are fond of fish. Fish cannot be cooked in the Ashram. We are old. We've been vegetarians for twenty years, as Gandhiji taught us. But how can I force vegetarianism upon the boys? You know how I feel. You've invited the boys to meals again and again and cooked fish for them. You've even invited me. Oh, I know how much you care for us! I'm indebted to you forever and forever. My tongue should drop out of my mouth when I speak ill of you. It's sinful to have unkind thoughts about you. My heart is not itself, not right, today The world is bitter poison to me now. How can I think anything good? You are a mother to Bilu, I do not have to explain to you how I feel. Bilu is fond of you. He has a great deal of respect for you. How can I be angry on a day like this? Angry with one whom Bilu has called 'Mother'? I know how much it meant to him to address you in that way. For him it was not a formality. His whole heart was behind it The boys are not sons to me. They're my enemies! If I'd loved God half as much as I love my sons certainly I should have found Him. But the more I cling to my sons the more they tend to slip away. This bond is a slip knot, a noose. If it were not Bilu always knew at once when I tiptoed up behind him while he was reading on

the verandah. "I smell Mother," he would cry. And he was really aware of a smell. "After you've had your bath I can smell Mother on you," he used to exclaim when he was very small as he threw his arms around my neck.

"You naughty boy," I'd answer, "don't touch me with your dirty clothes. There's lots for me to do in the chapel and I must cook. A world of work awaits me."

"Does touching pollute handspun silk?" the child would persist. And Nilu is such a rascal that he never forgets anything. He teases me, reminding me of all sorts of trifles, saying, "Mother, you love Dada more than you love me." Crazy fellow, is that possible? Can a mother love one son more and another less? That is not God's law. And Nilu asked, "What would happen, Mother, if the *Bak* devil came to Purnea? He eats only boys' flesh. Nothing else. Every family is forced to sacrifice one son to him. Today is your turn. Now tell me, which of us would you send to the *Bak* in such circumstances? Dada or me?"

"You say the silliest things! Don't talk nonsense. Stop it. I don't know where you get such ideas. Which of you would I send? Neither!" And Nilu at once shouted. "I know! I know!" and turned the house upside down. You know nothing! If you boys understood what goes on in your mother's heart I'd have nothing to grieve for. Would Nilu ever have tried to explain to me that a mother loves out of self-interest, selfishly? He told me a story to make his point. "A cat and a kitten were put in a pan and the pan put on the fire. To prevent the cat from escaping a lid was put on the pan. When the pan got very hot the cat climbed on the back of the kitten." All mothers are supposed to be like that. Every mother is concerned for her offspring only so long as she herself is comfortable. I have no idea where boys learn such nonsense! Is it taught in college? Bilu never talks like that. To argue about it with Nilu is revolting. But it has stuck in my mind. Another time he said something else which I'll never be able to forget. It was also something about a mother's selfishness. Small tremors follow a severe earthquake and last for some time. One night, Jiten's wife, dazed with sleep, left her baby and ran outside during a tremor. The whole family was hard on the poor girl afterwards. Where could she go to escape

blame? Nilu acquired another story for his collection. He forced me to listen to them. Oh, yes, you fellow, mothers are selfish, selfish a thousand times over. The love of sons is unselfish, unalloyed! How's that now? What a lot of trouble Nilu has caused me! The two brothers, Nilu and Bilu, grew up together. I wonder where Nilu learned to be so naughty. Sometimes he teases and teases until I'm in tears. One day I felt drowsy. The noon was hot. The sweet child brought in a lot of dried balsam pods and started popping them open under my nose. The seeds went into my nostrils and my ears. Oh! My goodness! I cried out. Scolding has no effect on him whatsoever. He only grins. He has no sense of judgement and never sees the difference between the serious and the frivolous. His own whims occupy him entirely. One day he — when he was only so high — killed one bed bug after another and wrote on a signboard with their blood, 'Non-violence is the best of religions.' I knew who it was that he was mocking. I pretended not to see the writing for I was afraid of what his father might think if he came to know. Oh, you, Nilu, when your parents are no longer here you'll understand what they were to you! A person doesn't appreciate his teeth until he loses them. Nilu used to cook meat on the boundary line of the Ashram, just to provoke his father. He'd measure the line by inches. "It's forbidden to eat meat on Ashram land but not here," he would say. Now look here, Oh, you, Nilu, is the eating of meat forbidden only because Mahatmaji drinks goat's milk? You know very well why meat is forbidden in the Ashram and so do I. Why, then, must you hurt your father by saying and doing such things? You like meat and I cannot cook it for you. Do you think I'm not sorry? But it is the rule in the Ashram. What can I do? Haven't I gone to Jathaima's house often just to watch you two eat fish, to see your satisfaction? Nilu loves fish. He even chews up the bones of the *reowa*. Bilu has often said that he wants to become a vegetarian Jathaima and I have persuaded him not to. His health is so delicate! The little fish he gets at Jathaima's now and then is good for him. In the part of the country where I was brought up we could not think of rice without fish to go with it. And my children! To what a plight have we brought them! They know nothing of Bengal, its ways, its speech, its

customs. They've never lived there. They don't know how to swim. They've never heard of floods nor of trees like the mangosteen and hijal. One day I told them about the *dhap kirtan.* Nilu was greatly amused at the word *dhap.* He said he had never heard such a funny name for anything. Once I asked Bilu to bring the flat pan we call *tijel* from the other room. He asked me what a *tijel* is. They do not know things that any child in our part of the country knows without being taught. What do they know about the *bratas* and *parvanas,* performed around the calendar, more *bratas* than months? Bilu asks about everything in detail. He wants to know. "Mother, which pujah is called *del*? What did you do on the *charak* day when you were little? What is the tune of a *gajon* like? Were there any *bairagis* in your village?" He has to ask. Once, I don't remember how long ago it was but Bilu was still very small, I told him that Nikhil Chaudhury had died when he went to the cremation ground to subdue evil spirits. I heard him speak of it only the other day. If I ask him, "What will you do when you know all these things?" he answers, "I'll have your childhood by heart." Have my childhood by heart? How sweetly the boy talks! Happiness wells up inside me and overflows. Nilu is not concerned with such things. Where will he find the time or the patience to listen? He's on the move day and night. Now and then he tumbles into the house, pulls off his clothes and shouts, "Mother, wash my undershirt with soap!" Rubbing a little oil into his hair he pours a few pots of water over himself and storms into the kitchen. "Haven't you served my rice yet?" he cries, ignoring the fact that Bilu and I have been sitting there waiting for him for a long time, watching over his rice. The cooking was finished and everybody else had been served. Bilu washes his own clothes and he often washes Nilu's too. How can the two be compared?

"How are you feeling now?" Naini Devi pokes me with a finger.

Won't they give me any respite? Is there no way for me to get a little peace so I can think of Bilu and try to draw closer to him? How solicitous they are! Now they'll ask me a string of questions, one after another, like a gramophone disc. No sooner have I answered one than I have to prepare myself for the next. Naini Devi is not to be deterred. She

wouldn't stop even if the prison caught fire. Her concern is killing! "Yes, my dear, yes," I answer, "I'm very well, I don't feel any nausea, my head is aching less, I don't feel hot, there is no burning in my stomach, the bitter taste in my mouth has diminished. It's not necessary to straighten the bed or shake out the blanket. Is that all? You need not worry about me. Now crawl over to your own bed, cool yourself off and lie down." My answer has upset Naini Devi. Perhaps she is wondering if I am in my right mind. She has gone over to her own bed without a word. She is not the person to take a scolding from anybody. She is certain to make trouble over what I have just said to her, if not today, tomorrow. A few days ago her mother came for an interview. She took a few things she had been given in the jail to the gate with her, soap, a pencil, a notebook, butter, raisins, and so forth, to send them home with her mother. The C.I.D. and the Head Warder caught her. At first she quarrelled with them. "These are my own things," she said. "Why won't you let me give them to my Mother?" "Don't try to teach the law to me," retorted the C.I.D. man, "You can't do it. But if you change your tone and plead with me a little, if you say these things are needed at home, I may permit your mother to take them." Naini Devi agreed. The Gate Warder was given a share of the raisins. Just see! How insulting it was for her! And was it an insult only to her? Lime and lampblack were thrown into the faces of all of us. The wardress told the whole ward about it. Bahuriya is sharp-tongued and indiscreet. She said something about it to Naini Devi. Fire flamed. Where could Bahuriyaji escape to? What a terrible scene it was! Time and time again she was on the point of striking Bahuriyaji. It was soft ground. Where had all her spirit been in front of the C.I.D.? For the following fifteen days she and Kukurkundali, a friend of Bahuriyaji, were at it. She's a match for a hundred and one opponents, all by herself. What poison there is in her words! How they burn! There is a proverb that runs: 'The buffalo's horn is curved. She fights alone!' She can make everybody cool down. Who knows what she will not do if she starts in on me? Ah! Let her do what she likes. Let her do whatever strikes her fancy. What worse curse is there than to wish me dead? What can she do to me that God has

not done? There's a limit to all things. Is there no end to grief? My blood turns to water when I think of Bilu. As if that were not enough the wardress, Chamin, had to add one day, "Bengali Maiji, the government didn't want to punish your son this way. Another son of yours gave evidence against him." What was she saying? I shook all over. "Who told you that?" I demanded. "Naini Devi told me the other day that she had heard it. She asked me to ask the outside warders. They said it is true. Naini Devi forbade me to tell you, Maiji, but I thought that, since it concerns your family, you ought to know. Everybody else knows. People are talking about it. How can it have happened? I, too, am religious. Maiji, have your sons quarrelled? My brothers split each other's heads open once over a bread-fruit tree. The police made a fuss over it. Money had to be spent by the handful. The police inspector withdrew the case for seventeen rupees. Do you have lots of land and livestock, Maiji? That son is not a follower of Gandhiji, is he? No one can predict what kind of a child will be born to whom." My heart shrank as I listened. "You're spreading lies! I shall report against you!" I said. "Maiji" she answered, "I thought I did well to tell you. It may not be true. I have only repeated what I've heard. I haven't added a word of my own. Please don't report against me. My husband has been paralysed for three years now. The children eat what I earn." I said, "All right! All right! Now go away! And be careful! Never say a thing like that to me again." She went away. But my heart has been turning over and over ever since. How can people fabricate such a monstrous lie?

Bilu, wearing underpants, was pinching the fat cheeks of his little brother, Nilu, affectionately and murmuring, "Nilu, Nilu, Pilu, Pilu...."

Nilu bear witness against his Dada? I cannot believe it. I'll never believe it, not till I die! Nilu doesn't understand, Nilu is stubborn, Nilu is wayward—all that is true -but he loves his brother as his life. Could Nilu do it? The thought makes my blood run cold. What if it's true? I had an interview with his father at the Jail Gate the other day. The Superintendent allows us the special privilege of seeing each other now and then. I thought of speaking about it, of asking if he has heard anything. Then I thought, no, how can I? What if he were

to answer, "Even you doubt Nilu?" And suppose it is true. I could tell by looking at him what a storm is raging in his breast. And I know what is happening inside me. I can guess a little of what he feels. I noticed he was unable to look me in the face. In the end I did not ask. The words stayed unspoken. The C.I.D. man said, "Your time is up. Get up now." Again and again the thought comes back to me. Can Nilu have done a thing like that? He is so devoted to his Dada. I cannot think of him separately. Nilu has a bad temper. I'm always afraid of what he may do outside the house. But the thought that Bilu is there to control him consoles me. It was a consolation to me also when he went to jail. When he was still lisping he used to complain to Bilu whenever anyone said anything to him, "Oh, Jaja. see . . ."

One day the boys were playing under the mango tree near the Headmaster's residence. Hamid the bookbinder came in through the gate. He made a mock salaam from a distance and said, "*Adab*, Nilu Babu, I'll get you married to an old memsaheb. Yesterday an old memsaheb told me that she would not marry anybody but Nilu Babu."

"Just see, Dada, what he's saying to me!"

"He's teasing. He's not serious. Do old memsahebs get married?"

"No," protested Nilu, "Why should he talk like that?"

"The old memsaheb has a moustache," the bookbinder went on, "At first she said she wanted to marry me. I told her I couldn't marry anyone without a beard. Then she said, "Well, marry me to Nilu Babu.' "

"Dada!! See."

Nilu began to cry. Bilu comforted him and brought him to me. "Do you have to cry when you are teased? Stupid boy! The more you cry, the more you'll be teased."

Bilu told me about it. "Nilu doesn't understand," he said, "The more I explain the more he cries."

"You're his elder brother, his Dada," I said, "Who can make him understand if you cannot?" Bilu was delighted. The responsibility of being an elder brother is a heavy one but to him it was a pleasure.

Bilu has always watched over Nilu. Nilu used to play with the seeds of the *kolke*. A game is played with them in this

part of the country which is called something like *nal kanai.* "You know the seeds are poisonous, don't you?" I asked Bilu.

"You don't have to tell me," he answered with a proud air of experience, "The other day Nilu and his friends were gathering castor seeds. They thought they were Hindusthani nuts and wanted to eat them. I stopped them."

Bilu never let Nilu out of his sight when he was small. He was not so big himself! He would button Nilu's clothes, tie his shoe laces, do everything for him. Nilu could never do anything against Bilu! If he has done anything he hasn't done it of his own free will. He might do it under police pressure. That Police Superintendent is capable of anything! He may have tortured Nilu. He must have broken down and cried in front of the judge when he gave his evidence. He must have been forced to do it. No, it is unbelievable! Chamain the wardress has drawn wrong conclusions. Who knows what exactly she was told? She used her imagination seven times over! Will I ever be able to look at Nilu again if he has done it? I'll go away, just following my nose. My heart tells me it cannot have happened. Can a mother's intuition be wrong?

Bilu and Nilu went to Kapiladeo's wedding. I didn't want them to go. They were still small. I was afraid they'd get sick. The habits and manners of the family are not familiar to them. Who knew what mistakes they might not make? But they began to say they wanted to attend the wedding the day the barber came from Dahibhat and put an areca nut smeared with tamarind paste in each of their hands. Kapiladeo's father was still living. He came to fetch the boys in his ox cart. They were not away more than eight or ten days. What an education children receive in this part of the country! They learned a number of silly songs in that short time. Nilu sat at one end of the yard and Bilu at the other. Each had an old biscuit tin in front of him and they held sticks in their hands. They pounded the tins with them. "This time, Dada," Nilu said, "I shall not play The Five-legged Goat. Neither will I play The Corn Is Popping. Let's play the wedding song." They started. Bilu sang, "Five times has Kapiladeo married!" Nilu answered from the other corner on behalf of the bride's party "Beat the drums! Beat the drums loudly! Kapiladeo has been married many

times!" I scolded them soundly. Boys of respectable families do not sing such vulgar songs. Bilu was terribly embarrassed. "All the boys and girls of Dahibhat sang those songs at Kapiladeo's house." Nilu answered, "Don't they belong to respectable families?" Nilu always does what he's forbidden to do, and does it with bravado. But Bilu understood me. How long could Nilu keep it up after Bilu stopped? All by himself? Nilu only imitates. He sang on for a while, louder than ever, so that even I could hear, *'Takai ke takadum* The Corn is Popping.' But he calmed down slowly. Later I heard him go up to Bilu and ask in a whisper, "Dada, are the songs really so bad?" They would not be bad unless Bilu said so. What Bilu said was law. All my explaining, scolding, protesting, counted for nothing!

Since they've grown up I've often found them, the two brothers, sitting in a room together, talking. If I go in to ask something or just to join in their chatting Nilu immediately says something to Bilu in English and laughs. English is a harsh language. I understand that he has said something about me, made a mocking remark or a joke. If one speaks in English it is not an offence to pass remarks about one's elders! What a training he has been given! "Don't be angry, Mother," Bilu would say, "Nilu has not said anything offensive. Nilu, why do you tease Mother so unnecessarily?"

What demands do I make on you boys? Can't you say a kind word now and then? Nilu, how often do you come to talk to me during the day? Must you speak in that tone, as if you're kicking me? You're laughing again. Aren't you ashamed? You'll never grow up. *Angar saradhoutena malinascha n manchati.* He bursts out laughing again. I suppose I've made a mistake.

"Wardress! Wardress! O Manchaniya! Is the Bengali Maiji asleep?"

Where is the wardress? Where is Manchaniya? The wardress is asleep on the verandah and Manchaniya is sitting beside me, drowsing. Who is to answer Narmada Behn? It's better not to answer. Otherwise Manchaniya may pester me with her attentions again. Narmada Behn's home is in Ahmedabad. Her family is very wealthy. She has been abroad. Only her dress and her manners are Indian. Everything else about her is foreign. She is one of Gandhiji's favourite disciples. Her skin is fair and she dresses in very fine homespun. She came to Bihar to work among

the labourers at Jamshedpur and was arrested there. There is a small room at the front end of our ward which is quite separate. It is used as a confinement room or to isolate prisoners who have contagious diseases. Narmada Behn speaks English and can talk to the Superintendent. She obtained his permission to live in that room by herself. She's wealthy. To live here with all the rest of us was inconvenient for her. She has arranged the room very prettily, hanging up curtains and putting covers on the tables. She has made a flower garden around it and spends all her time in it. Everyday she brings me flowers. Flowers are beside my bed now, in a glass vase. They look like paper flowers. They've no scent at all. Bilu would certainly know the name. How many kinds of flowers Bilu planted in the Ashram! He always told me the name of each new variety of season flower as it began to blossom. How can I remember them all? They were English names. I am fond of Narmada Behn because she loves flowers as Bilu does. She gives me so many! But what do I know about flowers? It's casting pearls before swine. If she could manage to send Bilu some flowers I'd know that her brave English is of some use! Surely the Superintendent would give her permission if she were to ask him. One day I told her about Bilu, about his love for flowers, hoping she would take the hint. But why should she? Did she educate herself abroad on rice? Learning is one thing and intelligence is another. She has brought me flowers every day since. And when she asked a favour of the Superintendent she asked to be given a European diet for her own convenience! The saheb sends a loaf of bread with cream filling for her every day from his own house. I hesitate to tell her what I feel or think. She's inclined to lecture. In and out of season she talks to us about truth and non-violence, like a village story-teller! Her Hindi is no better than mine. Half of what she says is unintelligible. Once in a while we catch a word or two, truth, *ahimsa*, Gandhi. If one has to lecture, one should learn to do it delightfully, like a professional. Do they teach oratory in Gandhiji's Ashram? No, Bilu went to Sabarmati once. He never said anything about it. And why does Narmada Behn choose to lecture me of all people? Does she think I do not tell the truth? Or that I envy other women their jewelry? Why must you say all those things to me? I've been listening to them for

twenty years. My ears are maggotty with them! How many lectures I've had to attend! And Narmada Behn thinks she is telling me something new. Bilu's father tried so hard to explain it all to me in the beginning! That was when the Ashram was new. My heart was fully occupied with Nilu and Bilu and the house. I had no desire to bother myself with anything else and neither did I understand. What he said went in one ear and out the other. The only thing I gained was that I felt I drew a little closer to him. He is taciturn by disposition. Have I ever been able to talk freely to him? Freely? I die of fright. It's not with us as it with others. Only a woman can understand who knows what it means to repress every smile, to be always afraid of doing something wrong, to never say what she thinks to her husband. He started to teach me what I should say in front of Hindusthanis when the subject of the spinning wheel, Mahatmaji or the country comes up for discussion. He taught me many little rhymes in Hindi. Nobody here will understand Bengali ones. Others have to be found or made. He lectures often, in many places. He has need to know these things. I've forgotten them all. There was one, I remember now, in which the husband wants to marry a second time. The wife comes to know and says, "Marry if you like. Don't worry about me. I'll support myself with my spinning wheel." There are other stories of the same kind. Perhaps he hoped I'd learn to lecture too, like he does. He stopped trying when he realised that it was useless, that nothing could be done with me, that to teach me was to pour fat into cinders. I was relieved. He, he, sacrificed everything to take up this work. Good. I didn't prevent him. I'm prepared to suffer all my life. You ask me to come to jail. I come. But to stand up in a marketplace crowded with people and say, "Dear brothers--" is something I cannot do. Looking after the Ashram and bringing up the children is also a contribution. It's also important work.

Before the Ramgarh Congress session I went, on his instructions, to Babhanagamay. How embarrassed I was! How embarrassed! A letter had come from Patna asking that some local girl volunteers be sent immediately. It was urgent. They had to start training at once or they would not be ready in time for the Congress session. A lady had come to Ramgarh from Maharastra to conduct the course. Our honour was at stake.

The honour of the district was at stake. There are, to be frank, only about five workers in the whole district prepared to go to jail, myself, Hardar Dubey, Bahuriyaji, Sarala Devi of Burahiyadhankata and Khadijunnisa of Chopra. For the last few years Khadijunnisa has been unable to leave her house because of a cataract that is forming over her eye. Saraswati came in this time. I was told to go to all the houses of all the Congress workers in Koraha thana. The women must be persuaded, by hook or by crook, to sign the Girl Volunteer's pledge. It was not enough for the men to go. The women must go to. They would be able to see the Congress Session free. There were no age restrictions. Older women would do the lighter work like looking after the children and keeping the keys of the stores and things like that. He explained all this and much more to me, before I set out. Volunteer Misri drove my ox cart to Bhabhanagamay. All the girls and women gathered in a courtyard to talk to me at noon. I asked them to become *sevikas*. How many questions they asked! Would they have to wear shoes? Would they have to ride horses? Would they not be allowed to put vermillion in the parting of their hair? Would Sundays be kept or not? So many irrelevant things! A few agreed provided, of course, the men had no objection. I went again, to talk to the men. I knew all of them. They often stayed at the Ashram. At first they were evasive but when one at last gave his consent all the others did so as well. Then I took the pledge forms and went back into the houses to get the women to sign them. Ink was brought, a pen was brought, several even signed and others put their thumbprints on the forms. Sakuntala read the pledge out aloud to everybody: "I am prepared to sacrifice everything for my country."

"What does sacrifice mean? I don't quite understand. Bengali Maiji, is it right for you to make us promise to sacrifice everything for the country?" Doubts began to assail them. They had been well-disposed at first. Now Begarimia's grandmother broke out, with warmth. She said, "What do we know about your Mahatma and all the rest? What are you asking us? An Islamic word has been used for 'sacrifice'. If you want to turn Mohammedan yourself, go and do it. But why do you want to pull our caste about? Have you come all the way from the Ashram

just for this? Shame on you! Shame! A cow is the living incarnation of God. You've come here to make us sign a paper proving that we've sacrificed our caste!"

They all turned on me. I was at a loss for an answer. Why had an Islamic word been used? My husband had told me so many things before I came but he had not told me that. Perhaps pledge forms for Mohammedans had been given to me by mistake. I was so frightened beads of perspiration appeared on my forehead. I explained to them that I do not know Hindi and the forms might be the wrong ones. How could I pacify them? I came out and said to Jhaji, "I'll have to come back again with the right forms." Jhaji read the pledge and roared with laughter. "It's all right," he said, "in Hindi *karban* means sacrifice." What a mess! Just see! How was I to know? I may be ignorant but none of the women present knew either. If they didn't know what the word meant why should it be used? Those for whom the pledge was intended did not understand it. We managed to finish our work for the day after a fashion. When I got back to the Ashram I said, "Here are your papers. I bow to the ground before your work with the deepest veneration but if I ever go out on such a mission again . . ." Nilu has teased me a lot about it!

Sakhavati's son is calling me, "Bangaji! Bangaji!" That is his name for me. He is very fond of me and is always somewhere close by waiting for the opportunity to climb into my lap. When he is very naughty and disobedient his mother brings him to me. He quietens at once. She ought to bring him to me now. Manchaniya has been asleep for a long time. She's not likely to wake up. Gal kati is on duty. She is drowsing beside me where she sits, fan in hand. She has worked all day in the rice cleaning squad. How can she keep awake all night? She didn't leave her sleep at home when she came to prison. What was her crime? The oppression of a graceless husband drove her to attempt suicide. She cut her throat with a razor. It makes me shudder to think of it. It's impossible to look at her throat. There is no sore but her windpipe gapes open. One can see into it. She keeps the opening covered by tying a thin handtowel over it. If she doesn't keep it covered her breath whistles through it when she talks and her food drops out. The towel gets wet when she drinks water. What a

wretchedly unlucky woman! Death might have been an escape for her and set her husband free also. But she didn't die. Nothing was solved. The only thing she achieved was a year in prison for attempted suicide. What laws they have! No one has a right to his own life. A person who does not want to die is hanged and one who does not want to live is imprisoned.

The child is screaming. He'll tear his throat out. What is his mother thinking of? Aha! The boy has not been allowed to come to me the whole day. "Ladli," Sakhavati is saying, "do you want to go to Bangaji? She's sick today, Ladli. You can go to her tomorrow morning. You shouldn't disturb her when she's sick." The boy is quiet. He is trying to understand what his mother has said. Now he has begun to cry again, "Bangaji . . ."

"Look," his mother says, "Galakati's there. She'll catch you." The boy stops, in terror. Then his monotonous wail is resumed, "Bangaji . . ."

"Obstinate! How obstinate the boy is! So young and already so obstinate!" His mother slaps him. Hard. Has she no pity?

"Galakati! Galakati!" I call, "Bring the boy to me. Quick. Will you?"

"Will he come with me?" Galakati's answer is hoarse. She's lazy. She doesn't want to get up because she's sleepy. She's found an excuse. Bahuriyaji has heard me call Galakati. So has Kamala and several others. "What do you want?" they crowd around me, "Do you want a drink of water?" Oh, dear, why did I call Galakati? They'll kill me. How was I to know they were sitting so close to me? They were very quiet. It's true that the child is frightened by the sight of Galakati. Everybody in our ward sometimes barters washing soap for cigarettes. Then they give the cigarettes to Galakati and watch the fun. The smoke comes out of the opening in her throat. For four cigarettes Galakati will untie the hand towel and let everybody see the smoke come out. Ladli goes blue with fright when this happens and clings to me. He's only a child! The sight makes many a grown-up feel sick and dizzy.

Bahuriyaji, receiving no reply from me, shakes the drowsy Galakati awake and asks, "What was the Bengali Maiji saying?"

"Maiji asked for Ladli to be brought to her."

"Why don't you say so! I'll bring him. Galakati, go and sit

by the door for a while. The boy will cry if you are here. You can come back when Ladli goes to sleep."

Galakati is much relieved. Bahuriyaji has brought the child to me. Ladli throws himself around my neck. "Do you want to lie down? Lie down here, Ladli. Let me fan you. Good little boys don't stay up to midnight. How obedient my Ladli is!" Where has his crying gone? What has happened to his obstinacy? Ladli is lying against my breast. I put one of the flowers Narmada Behn has given me into his hand. "I'll give you all the flowers tomorrow morning." He throws the flower aside. He doesn't need any flowers now. He doesn't need anything. He has what he wanted. If I don't fan him the mosquitoes will eat him up. Bahuriya saw me looking for the fan. She's fanning him herself. She never dared to do it before. She's afraid of annoying me. Does Sakhavati dislike the boy's being so fond of me? I don't think so. Then why do I resent Jathaima? Sakhavati has a much better heart than I have. Narmada Behn doesn't lecture me on non-violence without reason. Bahuriyaji is also fond of Ladli. Her little girl, Lojja, was his fast friend. Lojja was about five years old. She was inseparable from her mother. When Bahuriyaji was arrested she wanted Lojja to stay behind with her aunt. But the little girl refused absolutely to let go of her mother's sari. There was a lot of trouble. Children over three are not allowed to accompany their mothers to prison. The Police Superintendent said she should be left behind. Bahuriyaji was forced to quarrel with him. "Who said she is over three?" she demanded, "Measure her! Can a child so small be over three? I'll see how you manage to take me without her! I'll have you arrested by a nationalist volunteer."

The Police Superintendent did not think it worth the trouble to argue. He let Lojja come with her mother and shut them both up in prison. Ladli and Lojja spent the time playing together. Lojja carried Ladli around on her hip. They didn't have many playmates. The only other children are in other wards, bad children whose parents are low caste. They have all sorts of diseases and they use foul language among themselves. Can we permit our children to play with them? We kept watch over them day and night. Ah! The girl died of bacillary dysentery. She was sick only a few days. A mother's heart! How Bahuriya cried! She grieved and grieved. "If only I hadn't

brought her with me!" she wept, beating her breast, "This might not have happened." Ladli has grown thinner and thinner since Lojja died. He gets two cups of milk a day from the jail. It's jail milk. The milkman delivers buffalo's milk to begin with, milk that has been skimmed. The people who handle the milk on its way in, the guards, the warders, the other prisoners, at the gate, in the storeroom, in the wards, all pour out a glass each for themselves and drink it unboiled. This is an established practice. There is nothing furtive about it. Only one thing is obligatory. For every glass of milk poured out a glass of water has to be poured in. When this milk at last reaches the ward children do not find in it much that will help them to live and grow. Small children are not provided with either food or clothing by the jail authorities. Why should a child who has been weaned come to prison at all? That's the way they argue. A nice clear-cut answer!

Ah! The boy's stomach is a hollow. Why? Hasn't his mother given him anything to eat tonight? Food has been kept for me on the table near the head of my bed. Shall I give him some? No, it may make him sick. Then his mother will be put to trouble to look after him. How soft his little body is! Bilu used to snuggle up against me when he was little just like this. He was about this size when that photograph was taken of him in his grandfather's lap. He could not sit still. I held up a piece of sugar candy where he could see it. The photograph was snapped at the moment he smiled with the thought that the candy was about to be given to him. How long ago that was! How thin he was after his illness! He was hungry all the time. But he was never in the habit of whimpering. Sometimes I left him on the bed when I went into the kitchen or the storeroom. Sometimes I was detained. When I came back the boy's chest would be wet with his tears. His lower lip protruded slightly and trembled. How hurt he was! How hurt he was! "Are you crying because I've been long in coming?" I'd ask, "What a darling you are, Bilu mine!" I would draw his head to my breast. He was quiet by disposition. A sob now and then was the only sound. I can still feel the damp warm breath of his sobs on my neck. Ladli, are you my little Bilu? Shall I run my hands over your soft warm body the way I used to do? No, they're all watching me. What will they think? If I could have

Bilu with me for a little while now I could gather him to my breast this way. My heart would be eased of its pain a little. To be able to weep together would relieve both of us. God left no way open for me to be with him at the last. Iron doors and locks are all around me. I've heard that a lot of iron is needed to fight a war. Bilu once told me a church bell was melted down to make cannon. Has all the iron in a prison escaped everybody's notice? The sighs of so many unhappy hearts are enough to make Yama himself quake!

"Bahuriyaji, tell me the truth! Hasn't God been unjust to me?"

Bahuriya is looking into my face. She was not prepared for the question. She does not answer. She has turned to Nairi Devi and made a sign. Now she is running her fingers gently through my hair and fanning vigorously. I asked her the question suddenly, without thinking, but I neither want an answer or expect one.

Ladli has fallen asleep. He is just a little boy but he snores like a grown-up. Aha! He's lying on his side and the silver discs are cutting into the flesh of his abdomen. Must she put these silver discs on a string around his waist? Sakhavati thinks them very decorative. How often I've told her that this is a prison and many kinds of people live here. Greed for the silver may tempt one of them to do something to the boy some day. Crying won't help her then Sakhavati doesn't pay any attention. Who knows what charms she has tied on the string?

When Bilu was little I used to plait his hair over his forehead. He was delicate. His stomach was as round and big as the elephant god's after a meal. To amuse him I'd say when he finished, "Enough! Enough! Now get up! Bah! Ba! Re!" He pointed to his stomach and said, "Make it a pomelo! A pomelo." Once I ran my hand over his stomach and said, "Pomelo, go away! Pomelo, go away! May you digest all you've eaten. Bilu Babu will not be sick any more!" He remembered that. Every day I had to repeat the performance, saying, "Pomelo, go away! Pomelo, go away!" Then he would get up from the low stool, rising to his knees first and crying, "Bah! Ba! Re!" like an old man, as if it were really hard for him to get up

How many little things I remember! Bilu, I brought you up with so much trouble and care. Are you going to slip away from us like this? You must not let the thought of me grieve you at the last. I can't do anything to lighten the burden of your suffering. Don't I know what you're going through? I'll be pained beyond measure if the thought of me adds to your pain. On top of everything else! Imagine, if you can, that your mother never loved you.

Naini Devi is saying something to Bahuriyaji. Her tone is heated. Why should God be dragged into this? The Government passed the sentence and I blame God! Does Bahuriya remember that story? A Brahmin had a horse. A washerman who lived next door had an ass. Whenever the Brahmin sat down to worship the ass would bray "God," prayed the angry Brahmin, "this ass interferes with my worship of You. He disturbs me whenever I sit down to meditate upon You. Slay him!" Not long after the Brahmin's horse took ill and died. "Dear God!" cried the Brahmin, "You've been God for a long time now. Don't You know the difference between a horse and an ass?" This is the same sort of thing. What has it got to do with God?

Breathing can be suspended without holding the nose. Why can't hearing be stopped without putting your fingers into your ears? It will not look well for me to put my fingers into my ears. Don't I know this woman and her poisonous tongue? Is she just having a chat with Bahuriyaji or doing something else? I spoke to her a little strongly and now she is spitting her venom. I knew she was not the person to let it pass. She could not wait the night out! She couldn't forgive me on a night like this! You are the mother of children too. The story has no meaning whatsoever. I don't know where you heard it. It's not in the scriptures. You like to make a show of your learning. What? Has Naini Devi stopped so soon? Perhaps Bahuriyaji gave her no encouragement.

Why is it that I can think of Nilu and Bilu only as children? They are still little boys to me.

Both of them were in bed. I finished my work and came into the room, asking, "What are you doing, Bachkan and Chhatkan, sleeping?" Bilu was Bachkan and Nilu was Chhatkan. They laughed. Nilu found fault with my Hindi. 'Stupid!' Bilu ex-

plained, 'Mother is speaking that way intentionally, to amuse us.' They were still small but they discussed it with the gravity of pundits. If only they had not taken Gandhi's way! Did they have any real choice? It was their father's wish. If I could speak to their father, now I'd say, "Now see where you, their father, have led them." My own life has been spent in a way that has denied me a minute's peace. My sons have never known a single day's happiness. Has all my drudgery been for this? When the boys were small I sometimes felt that the quicker they grew up the better. They could choose their own ways if they were grown-up. A man doesn't have much to worry about. They'd have established families. It was so good to dream about! But what happened? Their father did not educate the eldest. The one to whom an education was given has no thought for anything but politics. Just let me get out of jail this time! I'll not let Nilu keep on the way he's going. I'll send him to my brother even if he takes a broom to him. Surely he'll find a way for the boy to earn something. You, you, married me and brought me away from my people. I'll run your Ashram-school for you forever and ever, working like a scullery maid, but why should my son be mixed up with it? I've put up with a great deal in silence. No more now. I've paid the price of my silence to the last copper coin! It was your idea to become a follower of Gandhiji. Did you think of me or my children at all? Not a day passes without a new fad! For some time you lived on a diet of gram. For a while you insisted upon being given *bethuwa* spinach. Another time you lived on tomato juice. How sick eating raw potols made you! For some days you insisted that tomatoes be served whole. Gandhiji had, it seems, said it was best to eat them that way. It was a waste of time to slice them. Gandhiji had made it a rule so it became a rule for us also. Then all at once, for no apparent reason, the rule was withdrawn. The Sevagram rules had been changed. Mahadev Desai had written in his paper that Gandhiji no longer regarded the eating of tomatoes whole as correct. The juice squirts over one's clothes when one bites down on them. Nothing more had to be said. Immediately our rule was changed. Had you bitten into tomatoes with your eyes closed? You eat exactly five dishes a day, in addition to rice. To eat six would pollute the scrip-

tures! Can a person always keep a careful count? You refuse to eat unless cow's *ghee* is served with your meal. Where am I to get cow's *ghee* in this part of the country? Botheration at every step! Have you been this way only since becoming a follower of Gandhiji? How was it before? You kept the keys. When you left for school you gave me a rupee for bazar expenses. Would I have eaten up all your money if you had left the keys with me? Or would I have emptied your cupboards sending presents to my father's people? Who knows what you thought? I never asked you. I didn't want to know. How insulted I was one day in front of some lower class people! The oilman's wife delivers oil to the school in the morning. The oil sold in the shop is not good. So I called her into the courtyard and asked her to give me a rupee's worth of oil. I told her to ask the master for money. He was sitting in the outer room. A few minutes later the oilman's wife reappeared, furiously demanding that I return the oil and declaring that I had wasted her time. The master had asked her who had kept the oil. The insult cut my head off. All these little things stick in my memory. It's true that you have sacrificed everything for the freedom of the country but you have not given me any freedom at all. How often I've thought of telling the boys so when they grew up! It's been on the tip of my tongue more than once but I have never been able to utter the words. How can I say such a thing to our sons? I've never defied or contradicted you in any way. I've looked into the faces of our sons and kept quiet. What has happened to me personally is of no consequence. But one of my sons has come to this because of his father. My family is ruined. My very own brother, at whose house so many boys reside while they prosecute their studies, never even inquires after his nephews. All because of you! Even Biren's mother said a great many harsh things to me one day. The Congress dismissed her son from his job with the District Board because he is a Bengali. She told me to my face, "Master Saheb! Muck! M.A.! Ass! He's in the Congress only to keep himself in power by humiliating Bengalis." Now, darkness surrounds me. I can see nothing else.

Gandhiji! What have you brought me to! You've turned us into beggars, really and truly beggars. Unless you put something into our hands at the end of every month we have

nothing to eat. I have worshipped you, setting aside my ancestral gods. For you I have left friends and kindred, for you forgotten laughter. What have you given me in return? Not a great deal I must say! Discord between husband and wife over what you ask us to do, discord between father and sons, brother turned into the enemy of brother! Home torn by strife! I have murmured your name as I told my beads at vespers, abandoning the traditional prayers. A lamp is set alight every evening at the spot where you sat when you visited our Ashram many years ago. I have spun every single day. Was it all for this? An untouchable's naked son has sat on the porch of my kitchen and shared a meal with Nilu and Bilu. I've called scavengers the people of God, Harijans. The neighbours have taunted me. Where has it all led? Durga's mother was right when she said that if we wished to work for the freedom of the country we could do so but these things we should not do. To upset the dispensation of the gods brings misfortune. I paid no heed to any warnings because I looked always to him, the father of my sons Today I feel it in my inmost heart. If Durga's mother or Khendi's mother or even Jiten's mother were here I'd throw my arms around their necks and cry to my heart's content. Mahatmaji? Muck! Does he look like a *sadhu*? Uh! What have I been doing? What have people done to me? I feel like tearing myself to pieces and gobbling the pieces up. I feel like beating my head on the ground until I die! No more! I'll throw my spinning wheel away, I'll smash it into pieces. Didn't I put it on the table?

I force myself to sit up in order to reach the spinning wheel. Can I get up? The left side of my head feels like twenty pounds of iron. Some one is putting my head back on the pillow. Bahuriyaji and Kamala Devi are both alarmed.

"Why did you get up, Bengali Maiji? What are you looking for? Why are you staring around you like that? Lie down! Shall I pour a little cool water on your head?"

They have forced me to lie down. I'll not tell them what I was looking for. They would conclude that I'm out of my mind. Who knows what they're thinking now anyway? They're putting eau de cologne on my forehead. Everybody in the ward has gathered around my bed. Galakati, in a voice like a

furnace, has called Lucy the wardress and is saying something. Something about me perhaps. I hope she doesn't go shouting to the hospital and create useless trouble. Sakhavati has picked the sleeping Ladli up from his place by my side. Is she afraid I might hurt her son? Take him! Take him! Do what you think good. You are his mother. How can I know what is good for him as well as you do? They'll all be sitting around me in silence, pin-drop silence. The only sound is made by the fan, a monotonous sound. A dung beetle is flying around. It rumbles. Bho - o - o. It has dropped to the ground. It's flying again. It has struck against something and dropped once more. It has risen . . not yet . . not yet. This time I must count to ten before it drops. If it drops before I reach ten there's no hope for Bilu but if I can get to ten he will be saved. God will save him. Somehow or other, God will save him. I'll have to count very fast, as fast as I can. There it goes—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven - - oh! The beetle's fallen. God! What have You done? Have You taken the last shred of hope away from me? There now. Fancies like these have no meaning at all. I make them up myself and I destroy them myself. What I imagined about the beetle can't be true. Everything is in God's hands! How I have demeaned God! Mother Purneswari, forgive me for all my faults! Bilu came into my lap through your goodness and grace. I named him Purna after you. Are you displeased with me because my family no longer participates in the offerings at your temple? When Bilu was sick I promised you an offering. I made it, didn't I? I don't remember. Could I have forgotten? Just see! What terrible consequences a little forgetfulness can have! Mother Purneswari, why didn't you remind me sooner? No, surely I kept my vow. Why should this happen? Mother, you are most efficacious goddess. Bilu is your son. Save his life! I'll never offend you again. And I'll never think Gandhiji greater than you!

Was the brick I tied to the tree at Barahamthan when Bilu was born taken down? Yes, Jiten's mother and I went there together. My big toe was smashed by a brass pot that dropped on it. I must have made the mistake then. I must have untied the wrong brick! That's it! That's it. How could I know which brick it was? There were so many!

There is a place close to Saraswati's house where the ground

beneath the peepul tree is smeared with vermillion. The deity is Dihowar, the local god of Dahibhat village. He guards the village precincts. Offerings are made to him there, terra cottah horses. Saraswati's mother told me that whenever there is a cholera epidemic or a drought Dihowar, by the grace of the goddess, mounts guard over the whole village. He is 120 feet tall. The village watchman has seen him on many midnights. I did not say anything to Saraswati's mother's face but I smiled to myself. I did not believe in the 120-foot-tall deity, a god who rides a horse a span long! Is it possible? Dihowar must surely have divined what I was thinking. It is Dihowar who, in his anger, is punishing me today. Or perhaps because I refused to let Bilu marry a girl of his village, Saraswati. Dihowar, save my Bilu! I'll do whatever you say from now on. How can a person as insignificant as I am survive if the gods are annoyed with me?

There! There! The blast of a horn. A car horn. Then my Bilu....

The green bottle with the strong smell is under my nose.

THE JAIL GATE

(*NILU*)

Here I am, standing beneath the portico in front of the jail gate with a warder, Nihal Singh. An armed sentry is posted at the gate, on the outside. The space inside is brightly illuminated. Beneath the light, on a high stool beside a desk, sits the Subahdar. Nihal Singh tells me to seat myself on the low wall in front of the portico. I do so obediently.

"Babu, have you brought blankets with you?"

"No," I answer.

He's asking the Subahdar for three or four blankets. The Subahdar passes them out through the bars. He folds them thickly and lays them on the low wall, dusting it off automatically.

"Babu, sit here."

He is explaining briefly to the sentry and to the Subahdar that I am the younger brother of the man who is to be hanged at dawn. He tells them I shall spend the night here. I am not to be disturbed, he says. The Subahdar does not take the information graciously. The boss inside the gate is the Head Warder. The boss outside the gate is the Subahdar. The Subahdar's official designation is Gate Warder. He is called Subahdar because he went to the war. His is the final say as to who enters the prison and who leaves it. He searches them, counts their money, examines their things. He inspects market purchases, deals with contractors and others. Why is an insignificant warder asking such an unreasonable favour of him, the powerful Subahdar? There must certainly be something in it.

"How much has he given you?" he asks.

Nihal Singh has been accepting money from me for some time. Every day he comes with a list of things he has given my brother to eat, saying he has had to purchase them in the market, that it is not easy to smuggle food into the jail.

"The Subahdar is tigerish," he says. "He demands a rupee for every item taken in. His salary is fifty-four rupees but he gets four times that much. His temper is as short as a corporal's. He was in the army, you know." After a great deal of

similar irrelevant talk he smiles and says, "Your Honour is a mother and father to me. I've left my home in order to earn my livelihood here in a place far away from my children and family, only because of people like you. I rely upon you." He wheedles money out of me with flattery.

Both the Subahdar and Nihal Singh want me to understand that if I wish to be allowed to stay here I'll have to incur some expense. Why else are they talking so loudly? They're speaking for my benefit.

"How much can he possibly give me? Isn't there something called religion? I swear he hasn't given me anything. He has permission to take the corpse away."

"He's welcome to it! If he's got permission. He hasn't been given permission to stay here. I can't take the responsibility of allowing outsiders to spend the night here."

The Subahdar has many more things to say. I call Nihal Singh and put a rupee in his hand. The Subahdar sees me do it. He says nothing. He'll claim his share later.

"See that the Babu is not disturbed," the Subahdar says to the sentry, "Pass the word on when the guard is changed."

Nihal Singh lifts his hands in farewell, murmuring, 'Pranam!" In this part of the country it is not the custom to say "namaste." The word "pranam" is used instead, indiscriminately. We, because we live here, have acquired the habit of using this and many other words in the local manner.

I still remember the language of Sisir's letter. Sisir was released from jail before we were. We always used to say that once a person is out of prison he losses all interest in the people still there. It's rare for anybody to remember. Yet it's so necessary for men whose lives, month after month and year after year, steam and rot in prison, whose wild life urge is so thwarted, numbed by regulations, men whose lives, like the feet of Chinese women, are deprived of the opportunity of natural and easy growth, to receive news of the outside world regularly. This is a need which cannot be provided for in the official rules. The arrival of a new prisoner is an aperture through which a little light is admitted into the dark palace of *yakshas*. And the one who has been torn from the busy outside world with all its sweet relationships makes a vain attempt to re-establish contact with it from inside the prison through the prisoner who is about

to be released. The newly released prisoner is like a safety valve to the prison. He provides an outlet for all the frustration, the endless tears, the pain, the futile rage and the impossible hopes. How many letters the departing prisoner is begged to write! How many interviews he must promise to give! How many small errands he has to promise to do! How many things are asked of him! On the day of his departure a procession accompanies him almost to the gate. There are garlands of flowers, embraces, *pranams, namastes, adabs,* unsought acquaintance, the excitement of leave-taking. No part of it lacks warmth or sincerity, even though it's part of jail procedure. But after that? What happens can be predicted blindfold. Postal employees can tell you how many people on the average will mail letters without addresses next year. And political prisoners can tell you that a released prisoner will forget everyone in the jail as soon as he is out of the gate. Sisir wrote a letter to my brother from outside just to prove us wrong. Dada underlined a few sentences. I still remember them. "Don't think I'm like the rest. I'm writing within seven days of my release. Give my greetings to so-and-so, so-and-so, etc."

Hardar Dubeji's wife is an old lady but she bows to my feet. She calls Dada her adopted son. They're poor. Yet when I met her the other day she untied a knot in the end of her sari, took out three rupees and gave it to me for Dada's court expenses. Her eyes flooded with tears. I imagine money is being given to Dubeji secretly. Why, I don't know....

Dubeji himself told me hesitantly and a little apprehensively, when the case was being tried, that if money was required he would find some. "My wife and I have not been arrested," he said, "only through God's grace. I participated in the procession. The biggest of the banners was in my hands. When it's god's will for me to stay outside it's my duty as a Congressman to do something for Bilu Babu, to help his case." I refused to accept the money. Dubeji construed my action to mean that I did not want to defend my brother. But I refused only because Aunt Jathaima had already given me three hundred rupees. She had managed to find them somewhere. Aunt Jathaima said, "Give this to Haren Babu, the lawyer." Her expression as she handed the money to me was exactly like the expression on the face of Dubeji's wife. Dubeji went to the lawyer's house too.

Dubeji was on horseback. The reddish brown horse was lame. Dubeji gave the horse a slap on the rump as he got off. He tethered the horse to the eucalyptus tree in front of Haren Babu's gate, removing the piece of burlap which served as a saddle from its back. He may have spent a lot of money. I also gave Haren Babu the money Aunt Jathaima sent him through me. Haren Babu is a friend of father's. Yet he did not hesitate to take money from Dubeji in addition to what Aunt Jathaima gave him.

Dubeji's wife told me about it afterwards. "My husband has done all he could to help our son. He's spent money like potherds. But what good did it do?" "The truth," she said, "is that the one backed by the police wins. The police listen to *you*. I'm told the Magistrate doesn't take any decision without first consulting you people. Look at Nokhe.al. He's a member of your party. He annoys all the shopkeepers in Hardar Bazar to death. The Police Inspector is in the palm of his hand. I've heard the government pays regular wages to your party members." I understood then the meaning of her offering me money secretly. Bilu Babu is her adopted son. They haven't hesitated to do what they, in their simplicity, consider necessary. They think I am a police agent. Who can blame them? What else can they think me? The whole country thinks the same. All the plainspoken lady did was to tell me so to my face, exercising a right our long acquaintance has given her. I felt like throwing the three rupees back at her. "The judgement has been delivered," I said. "What's the use of the money now?" I saw that she did not believe that the Magistrate or the Governor could do nothing. The disappointment in her face made me feel I ought to accept it. "All right," I said, "Give it to me." My logic and my principles crumbled before the passionate maternal concern of a childless woman for somebody else's son. What harm would it have done if I had relaxed my principles a little when I gave evidence at the trial? At that moment I was not an ordinary person. It was the time for me to stand alone, with my head high, against public opinion, against everybody, known and unknown. The strength of my principles had to be proven to my slanderers and my enemies. My personal obstinacy might have had something to do with it, in addition to my political convictions. Pressure was being put on me to change my

opinions. I do not hold opinions that can be so easily changed. Does anybody understand what was at the bottom of my heart? Most people think even worse of me that Dubeji's wife does. No doubt they do. I see the proof of it all the time. The other day when I cycled past a group of students smoking cigarettes at the football match I heard how loudly they cleared their throats. The neighbourhood children look at me with surprise and suspicion in their eyes. My childhood friend, Sourin, doesn't hesitate to pass right by me without any sign of recognition. I've received an anonymous letter threatening me with assault. What an illogical letter! First it spoke of my brother as the noble son of a noble father and then expressed doubts about my paternity! Even Aunt Jathaima and Nadi do not speak to me any more than is necessary. I overheard a member of the District Board remark to another that we two brothers are both in love with Sahadeo's sister. That is the reason that I gave evidence against my brother. Jealousy. How could anyone, in a case where the sentence is death, give evidence against his own brother otherwise? I've never thought of Saraswati in that way. And I never noticed anything in Dada's behaviour to show that he loves her. But who can keep people from talking?

What a crowd there was outside the jail the day I was witness in Dada's trial! The trial was held inside the jail. How could such a dangerous prisoner be produced in open court? I got out of the police van in front of the jail gate. Several village watchmen, a head watchman, a constable and a police inspector were with me. I couldn't face the crowd at first but I could feel the menace of its disapproval. Then I forced myself to straighten up and face it. Let them see the contempt I have for a mob. But in the state I was in I couldn't look directly at any single face. The warders stared at me that day the way people stare at animals in a zoo. The judge regarded me with approbation. And the prosecution lawyer and the police looked at me with doubt and anxiety. Only the eyes of the long-term prisoners were indifferent. Nobody else's eyes are like theirs. I didn't meet any political prisoners. I can imagine how full of hatred their eyes would have been! There were, beside Dada, two other accused in the case, Surajdeo and Harish Chandra. When I stood up to speak Harish Chandra shouted from his place in the dock, "Shame on you! Shame! Shame! Shame!" I turned

and looked at him. His eyes were bursting with contempt. Once, in the Ashram, I caught a grass snake with a pair of tongs and took it to Dada. Dada was working in the garden. Surajdeo had the same expression on his face that Dada had when he caught sight of the snake's white stomach. He seemed to want to turn away from me in bitter horror. And Dada! Dada was sitting on a blanket spread on the floor of the dock, reading a book with a red binding. He was completely unconcerned. It seemed to me that his absorption in the book was feigned, that he was forcing himself to control his eyes. Otherwise he would certainly have forbidden Harish Chandra to say anything. The prosecution lawyer complained to the judge about Harish Chandra's behaviour. The judge grew heated and looked at the defence lawyer with annoyance. Haren Babu made an effort to conceal his agitation with a cough. The Assistant Jailor on duty and the police inspector grew restive. If it had not been the court room they'd have shown the prisoner some fun. They exchanged meaning glances. The whole scene floats before my eyes! Harish Chandra was desperate. "What do you think you're doing?" he cried, "You can't do more than hang us, can you?" Warders and police surrounded the prisoners' dock. Harish Chandra hurled fiercely over their shoulders the word, "Mongrel!" The judge was wiping his spectacles. The court clerk hurried up to Harish Chandra and said something to him. Harish Chandra's eyes met Dada's. Dada's eyes were pleading. He wanted to say, "Stop it now, Harish Chandra, there's been a scene." Harish Chandra stopped. The proceedings were resumed.

Boots on the gravel road. Many boots. Coming this way. Nothing can be seen in the darkness except the distant light on the porch of the warders' long barracks. It has a black shade. In the barracks the warders are singing. Cymbals and drum are accompanying them. *Kirtan.* Their ugly voices are loud. The sound doesn't exactly float to my ears; it assails them, violently. The sound of marching feet is audible in spite of it. A group of warders appears. Most of them are wearing yellow Kabuli sandals. Two have very old boots. Perhaps proper boots are hard to get because of the war.

A gong above the jail gate is struck by a warder upstairs, announcing eleven o'clock. Twice in quick succession five times and then once. Two hours are gone already. I didn't notice

when ten o'clock struck. The group of warders are in front of the gate. They look at me doubtfully, as though to ask, "Who's turned up here?" One asks me for matches. "I haven't any," I answer. The warder inside has unlocked the gate. The warders enter noisily. Their names are entered in the book.

The Subahdar asks with a laugh, "You're not taking contraband in, are you?"

"Search us, Sir," one of them says.

"Then I'll have to go home and bathe!" the Subahdar comments wryly. "I know you fellows. You don't keep things in your pockets."

The inner iron door has opened, not, of course, entirely. A small door occupies one of the panels of the large one. It is the small door that has opened. Beyond is solid darkness. One by one the new warders leave the bright light of the passage and disappear into the prison. A single warder stays behind. The Head Warder locks the gate. He carries more than a hundred huge keys on an enormous ring. The careless tug he gives the lock to see if it is properly closed is so mechanical it is almost a reflex movement. Now he is standing in front of the gate on my side. The armed sentry outside the gate has been changed. The other one was quiet and dignified. This one is different. The inside warder has asked him for tobacco. He grumbles and begins to talk. Perhaps they are talking about me. The warder who stayed behind the others is chatting with the Subahdar. The Subahdar, perched on his high stool, is fanning himself with a large notebook. Perhaps they are discussing gains and losses. May be something has to be removed from the jail surreptitiously. It's not possible for a person to do it alone. The internal discipline of the jail is such that until all the links in the chain connect no theft can be successful. Steal, but share what you get. Even the lowliest cannot be ignored.

The clock in the tower of the Magistrate's court is striking eleven. Jail clocks are always about fifteen minutes fast. The quarters of the jail staff line both sides of the road that passes in front of the prison. Dim lights can be seen here and there behind the curtained windows. Light blazes out from one of the buildings; a door has been opened. The straight lines of light fall outside, a trapezium, the side near the door being the shortest. Parallel tracks draw together on the horizon in the

same way. A figure emerges from the doorway. It goes over to another door in front of which it stands waiting for a minute or two. A second figure closes the door. How can the lights of these houses dispel the profound gloom of the prison area? Doors are devices to hold the light safe within. The doctor, wearing a lungi and an undershirt, has come up to the gate. He's chewing betelnut. Does cancer of the cheek really develop if betelnut is held too long in it? His shirt and khaki short pants hang over his shoulder with two or three other garments. He throws his feet out in front as he walks. The sentry clicks his heels and pulls himself up. How long will their Kabuli sandals last? The sentry salutes the doctor. The inside warder murmurs a greeting and unlocks the gate. Nodding in acknowledgment, the doctor goes in. The lock is turned again. The Subahdar, from his place on the stool, asks the doctor, "What are the clothes on your shoulder for?"

"My duty's in the hospital," the doctor answers. "But everybody'll be coming early tomorrow, the Magistrate, the Civil Surgeon. They may need me. I can't appear in front of them in a *lungi*! Of course I'm not on duty when there's a hanging, my boss is. But one never knows what may be required. And it's so hot!"

The doctor speaks in the tone of a wheedling, spoilt child. I notice that he is very polite to the Subahdar. The reason must be that unless the Subahdar permits, his children will grow up without the pure jail milk, a part of the meat allotted to the jail hospital will not be sent to his quarters, and he might be obliged to buy kerosene out of his own pocket. There are many other things too which jail officials consider a supplementary part of their salary. The Subahdar may stop their supplies at any time, mosquito nets, bedsheets, cotton, sugar, rice and other articles of common use. The warder who is on duty the last part of the night takes a basket of flowers for the doctor's wife with him when he leaves. She requires them for her morning worship daily. With the flowers go lemons and a wood apple. A roasted wood apple a day is necessary for the children. The doctor, in the course of his prison work, has forgotten his medical knowledge. Every day he has the same routine chores, accounts, attendance, files, dossiers, weighing, dispatch of returns, doing the rounds with his superior officer, ingratiating

himself with everybody from the assistant up. When does he have time to study or practice medicine? Once the jail doctor made me draft his returns for him. His name was, I think, Naren Babu. Among other things to be entered in the report was the spleenic index. I did not know how to calculate it. I asked him. He didn't know either. "Leave it now," he said, "I'll look up last year's returns and set down something approximately."

A blackboard hangs on the wall to the right as one enters the gate, like the square boards in stations on which the time table is posted. The number of prisoners the jail can accommodate is written there, how many prisoners are in it and how many are awaiting trial. Underneath is written the name of the doctor on duty.

The doctor takes up a piece of chalk and inscribes his name. Next to his name he writes that his duty began at 9 p.m. "There's a fan in the office and a fan in the Saheb's room," he laughs, "Why haven't you got one here?"

"Fate!" sighs the Subahdar, touching his forehead. His forehead is crossed by a protruding vein. I can see it from here.

I was told a story about a poor weaver who bore on his forehead the auspicious mark of royalty at Jitenda's initiation ceremony. I lay on Aunt Jathaima's bed and listened. I always notice the foreheads of people I see. Dada and I almost rubbed the skin off our own one day. We made marks like the sacred *tilak*. What with Mother's scolding and the teasing of the neighbours we couldn't go out of the house for several days.

The door has opened. The doctor goes in. The sound of marching feet can be heard through the door. A number of people must be approaching the gate from inside. The door has closed. A second or two later a small grill in the door opens, about six inches wide, and some one inside asks that the door be opened again. The voice speaks in Bhojpuri dialect. Again the lock is turned. The warders have no respite from locking and unlocking. It doesn't seem to tire them. The door was opened for the doctor to enter. The tramp of approaching feet made it obvious that people were coming. The door could have been kept open a few minutes. The labour of locking and unlocking it twice would have been saved. Do they work so mechanically because of the jail rules or from force of habit? The rules about the

opening of the door are odd in the extreme. There are two openings inside the jail gate. One is opposite the place where I am sitting, the other five or six yards further in. The passage between them resembles a large hall. It's the centre for both the outside and inside work of the prison. It may so happen that four cartloads of bricks are to be taken into the jail. First the warder will open the outer door and admit two carts. Then he will close it. Next he opens the inner door and allows the carts to pass through. Then he closes it. Coming back to the first door he opens it to admit the remaining two carts, closes it, opens the inner door and closes it again after them. As though it would pollute the Mahabharata to open the doors at the same time and let all four carts pass through together!

The group of warders inside is noisy. Shall I ask one of them who was on duty at the condemned cell? He could tell me what Dada is doing now. No. Let it be. What will he think? Perhaps he'll answer me with mockery. He may know about my giving evidence.

They are all anxious to get back to the barracks. It's late. Their names have been entered in the register. A warder has thrust his hand under the high desk in order to pass something to the Subahdar. He does not want anybody to see him do it. They're coming out. One by one. The Subahdar calls a young, fair-skinned warder and orders him to take off his turban. The Subahdar is searching his waist and inside his shorts. He has found nothing. The young warder is fuming with rage when he comes out.

"He thinks I'm the Head Warder's man," he complains, "that's why he misuses me. They quarrel among themselves and pull us about. Just wait! See if I don't pay him back for this by telling the Jailor! I don't care whether I lose my job or not." Then he cursed indecently and added, "Just let him try to say anything about my job."

The monotonous chorus of the *kirtan* is audible from here but it is impossible to distinguish a single word. Now and then, "Rama Ho Rama!" rises high with the melody like an exclamation. When I was small I once read a poem of which one line all that I could ever remember, ran, "Cartdriver!... Rama Hai!" It began, I think, with something like 'Baby girl, wake up! The morning has come.'

Jitenda, Aunt Jathaima's eldest son, bought story books with money he stole from his mother's trunk. His family discovered it when the parcel arrived from Calcutta. Jitenda ran away from home and stayed at our Ashram for a couple of days. His father declared he would't let him enter the house again. Aunt Jathaima presented two of the books to us brothers. The poem was in one of them. Jitenda stole money and had parcels sent to him time and again. Who took account of all the things he bought? A caram board, a badminton set, a football pump. What not? He'd be enthusiastic about a game for a time but he couldn't play any game well. How dignified and grave Jitenda is now! He earns good money as a building contractor. He regards us, that is to say, all indigent political workers with a good deal of pity and scorn. Who can make him understand that, if we tried, we could earn more than he does? Nothing succeeds like success.

The small grill in the inner door has opened again Somebody is speaking to the warder. The person's face cannot be seen in the darkness. Ali Baba's cave! Sesame! What had the cave to offer except heaps of riches? If this door were to open men who are buried alive so many of them—would be able to live again!

All of the jail is not wall. There is plenty of space inside. An open breeze can blow there. The yard of a jail is much larger than the yard of an ordinary house. But what of that? What though there is a flower garden in the jail, an avenue of *neem* trees with their cool shade, a large wood-apple tree, peepuls and banyans? The whole atmosphere is pervaded with sadness, lifeless, harsh fetid. The air is heavy. Have Oliver Lodge, Leadbeater and Conan Doyle told us the truth about psychical phenomena? When we think and feel deeply, profoundly, in an agitated state, do we release the forms of our thoughts in the places where we are? Are our thoughts like an onion that we can peel off in pieces and drop the pieces around, some thick, some thin? Is that the reason why we feel so eerie when we enter an old house?

The person who has emerged from the inside is the apothecary. He appears to be punctilious for he carries a lantern in his hand. For fear of snakes? The truth is that when he enters the prison the lantern is empty and when he leaves it the lan-

tern is full. Everybody knows it. Everybody understands what he does but nobody says anything. These small extras are looked upon as part of a jail employee's salary. He gets, say, twenty-five rupees. How can so many clothes, shoes and other things be bought out of that? He must surely share what he is able to obtain with the doctor.

"What's the matter? Aren't you very late today?" the Subahdar speaks to him affectionately.

"What an idiot I was to take a job in a jail!" he exclaims, "Not a minute off, Subahdar Saheb. I came on duty early this morning. Now its midnight. I've been home only for lunch. Sinheswar Babu was to come on duty at 9 p.m. He's just arrived, at midnight, after dinner and a chat with the missus, chewing betel nut."

He adds an indecent curse. It's not very clear whom he's cursing, his own luck, Sinheswar Babu, or the insect that has crawled inside his shirt. The only thing I gather is that the name of the doctor who has just entered the prison is Sinheswar Babu. The apothecary has got the insect out of his shirt. His expression is amusing. He talks of his troubles. "It's a bit better when Mitter Saheb is on night duty. He comes at nine o'clock or not at all."

They exchanged glances and smiled. "The Jailor Saheb knows it," he goes on, "He's found the doctor's room empty on his night round more than once. The Jailor knows everything that happens in the jail even without seeing it. His predecessor caught Mitter one day. Mitter justified himself, "What can I do?" he said, "There's no door on the room in which the doctor on duty is supposed to sleep. Somebody may beat me up during the night." That Jailor was clever. "The prisoners are locked up at night," he retorted, "Who is going to assault you?" The doctor said that trusties on night duty are not locked up. A mutiny had just taken place in the jail so the Jailor couldn't insist. But now? Trusties have not been put on night duty since those political prisoners from Muzaffarpur escaped. The trusties are thought to have helped them. That excuse is no longer valid. Now he'll have to find a new one. See here, old fellow, give me a cigarette. I'm absolutely done. My bones are breaking."

The Subahdar takes out a cigarette. The apothecary strikes

a light. They're talking now in lowered voices. The apothecary turns the wick of his lantern a little higher and picks it up. Giving the half-consumed cigarette a strong pull he hands it to the Subahdar. "Don't worry about that," he says as he emerges from the gate, "I'll give it." What have they been talking about all this time? What will he give? Not an injection, is it? The Subahdar and the apothecary are quite intimate. The apothecary asks him from outside, "Are you sleeping here tonight?"

"Yes, I've made up a bed in the office room. I'm going to bed now."

How long the hair at the back of the apothecary's head is! Most of it has turned gray. He's seen many prisoners hanged! He doesn't have a thought for the man who is to die at dawn. Do all apothecaries wear their hair long at the back?

The hair of the apothecary, Harish, was half-bobbed. Once he was mixing medicine for Madhav Babu's family. Madhav Babu is eccentric and suspicious by nature. He stood in back of Harish in order to see that he measured the ingredients correctly. "Can't you cut your hair a little shorter?" he demanded angrily, "I can't see what you're doing from behind." I told the story to Dada and Mother. How we laughed together over it! "Do you notice everything?" Mother cried, trying futilely to control her merriment. When Mother laughs her eyes fill with tears. Dada laughs soundlessly. There's a dimple in his left cheek. Amazing. Only one cheek dimples, not both. His eyes half close when he laugns. His laughing face is floating before my eyes . . .

The light of the lantern diminishes in the distance. It rocks from side to side. The apothecary's lantern. He swings himself when he walks. Gorillas walk like that. It wasn't so noticeable when he was close. Why's he going so far? Perhaps no government quarters have been allotted to him. From a distance there is no difference between the light of a lantern and the light of a clay lamp.

Dada, Sahadeo and I were on our way back from Ranipatrai where we had gone to inquire into a peasant's case. We were very tired. Seeing a light flickering in the darkness we decided to approach it in search of a place to pass the night. The glow of the light was soft, like the glow of a firefly. When we reached it we found it was the light of a Dietz lantern. The lantern

was old and rusty.

Light bedsteads, blankets and pillows are brought out for us. For Sahadeo, as a volunteer, a bed was made up on a mat. The bedsteads were placed in a thatched shed away from the house. There were no walls nor any kind of fencing. In this part of the country such a structure is called a *haowa-tungi.* The sight of the greasy pillow and the dirtiness of the sheet spread over the blanket revolted me. The germs of many diseases were certainly in them. I removed them from my bedstead and sat down on the uncovered blanket. A blanket doesn't show the dirt so much. That was my consolation. The man who gave us flattened rice and curds to eat had sore eyes which were running. Dada ate the food and lay down on the pillow and the sheet in complete unconcern. I've always noticed a streak of fatalism in Dada. His ability to fit into his surroundings is wonderful. If the subject is brought up he'll say there's no need to forgo courtesy if no fundamental principle is violated. He's self-centred and likes to think his own thoughts undisturbed. He works problems out in his own way, studying them with hair-splitting minuteness. He understands any thing complicated better than I do. But, in practical affairs, his actions are not consistent with his theories. He puts up with things that make me burn with indignation with a gentle smile, dismissing them with a brief word. He's not human. God Siva himself, with his blue throat! He doesn't lack courage. I've never seen him refrain from doing anything that had to be done through fear.

But his blood doesn't seem to warm at all. It never gets hot although his mind is sharp and his feelings keen. His impulses are not vigorous enough, his energy isn't as overpowering as it should be. Every step he takes is measured. He walks as though advancing along a path that is slippery, placing each foot with the greatest care.

How stiff Dada was in that three-legged race! We were partners at the Kumar Saheb Fair. We fell far behind. There wasn't the slightest nope of winning. "To run with you," I said to Dada in anger and sorrow afterwards, "is like running with a big drum slung around my neck."

I never saw him so put out, so embarrassed. "I warned you beforehand," he answered, "You're always first in sports. You insisted on dragging me into it. You could have taken Panna

as your partner."

That was twenty-one years ago, in 1922. Dada's face was wet with perspiration. He looked tired. His hair was dishevelled and dusty. He brushed his feet off with the loose end of his dhoti as he stood there panting. I felt badly. It gave me no pleasure to show Mother the prizes I won in the other races. Dada showed them to her. The next day he showed them to my friends. "Get Nilu to tell you what Rozario Saheb did," he told Mother, "I can't tell stories well myself." Dada knew how I felt. His eyes are so keen and understanding they see right through a person, into his heart. He was trying to make me feel better. I ought to have done something to compensate for my harshness. I had to tell Mother about Rozario Saheb. Rozario Saheb is the Kumar's manager. The Sports Meeting was organised under his supervision. In the 100 yard race no one can beat Khokanda. His proper name is Krinkari Ranjan Datta. He was first; I was second. No numbers were stitched to our shirts in the boys' sports. After each event Rozario Saheb asked the names of the winners and wrote them down on a piece of paper. He asked Khokanda his name. People were crowding around. There was noise. It's always that way after an event. Khokanda gave his name. The Saheb repeated his question two or three times. Perhaps he couldn't catch it. Then he jotted down my name and the names of two or three others after me. When the prizes were handed out the first prize was given to me. Tears sprang into Khokanda's eyes. His name was not there. Jitenda made fun of him. "How can the Saheb write a name like Krinkari Ranjan Dutta?" he jeered, "You've lost the prize because of the name your parents gave you. Go to the Kumar Saheb about it tomorrow morning."

I had expected the story to amuse Mother, that she would laugh. The opposite happened. I had to surrender the teapot which was the first prize to Khokanda the very next day. The upshot of it was that I lost the prize due to me. I remember the chagrin I felt every time I see Rozario Saheb.

Dada has never agreed to be my partner in a game since. He always finds an excuse to evade it. He never liked games very much. The only game he plays well is badminton. But he has never played with me. He is consistently courteous, his hospitality unbounded. But there is a point beyond which you can-

not approach him. He's so close to people yet somehow always a little detached, inaccessible. I haven't been able to compensate him for his hurt that day yet, in all these twenty-one years, though I've tried a hundred times.

They're still singing in the barracks. Judging from the noise, the *kirtan* is going well. They aren't singing 'Sitaram' any more, hymning the sacred names. A single, long, undulating melodic line, sung in unison, on the word 'Narayan', to a swift beat, gets louder and louder. This is the way *kirtan* usually ends. How can the foreign Superintendent put up with such unmelodious music so near his residential quarters? He may not want to antagonise the warders. Jail discipline cannot be maintained without wholehearted co-operation.

How long ago it was! Mr. Spiller, the judge, was a thin, irritable man, half-crazy. He used to hew wood every day for exercise. The German Kaiser had the same hobby. The nazir, Fazle Miah, was kept in a continual flutter obtaining logs for judge to cut up. What a scene Mr. Spiller created at the wedding of the lawyer, Bajaranga Prasad's, daughter! The wedding music was in full swing. Everything was going well. Spiller suddenly decided that the peace of his night was being disturbed. At once he set out for the lawyer's house, carrying a cane and a bull-eye's lantern. Without a word to anybody he thrust the cane through the head of the drum. The next day Bajaranga Babu started a lawsuit against him. The case was settled by arbitration some time later. When his indignation abated the lawyer realised that if he wanted to make a living in the law courts quarreling with the judge would not profit him. He had been insulted in the presence of kinsmen and invited quests. The more it was discussed the more painful it became. The less said about it the better.

How can I blame my countrymen? People everywhere are the same. The Sahebs are as much time-servers as we are. When the Congress Ministry was in office the District Magistrate, Mr. Vernon, used to visit our Ashram and dine with us of his own accord. Mrs. Vernon could not carry the rice to her mouth properly when she tried to eat with her hands. She put the rice into her hand just as rice is put into a spoon and inserted it into her mouth. She got rice and dhal all over her face. Mr. Vernon used to find excuses to come and see us. He showed a great

liking for homespun and the Gandhi cap. His daughter had a pet mongoose. It was causing a great deal of trouble. Mr. Vernon offered to give it to us if we could keep it in the Ashram. He gave it to Dada. Then the Magistrate began to come in and out of season, with his wife and daughter. His daughter had to see Riki. They fussed like children over Riki, caressing the mongoose and calling it back and forth.

Midnight has struck, setting the air atremble, breaking the thread of my thought, shattering the silence and the darkness. A dog is barking in the doctor's quarters. He must have been rudely wakened from a happy dream. "Ho-o-hai!" with a crash the cymbals, drum and voices stop. Do they sing according to the clock? How can they tell the time in advance? Hands tapping a tambourine, arms emerging from short khaki sleeves, the figure of a woman tatooed in red and blue above a cheap watch on the left wrist.

Father used to finish his *kirtan* singing at exactly eight o'clock. "*Raghupati raghava raja Ram, patita pavana Sita Ram*", Mahatmaji's favourite hymn, was sung last of all. All the Congress workers who happened to be present in the Ashram joined in the *kirtan* singing. Everybody thought it pleased Father for them to do so. Everyone in the district knows how fond he is of *kirtan*. The *kirtan* is held in the meeting hall. The floor is of cement, the walls of clay and the roof thatched. The walls are plastered neatly with cow dung by my mother herself. Small windows without shutters are placed at spaced intervals. Pictures of political leaders hang on the wall in between. On one side are two Congress flags, crossed. Above them is a wide strip of red bunting with the word 'Welcome!' written on it in *devanagari* letters. The letters are cut out of white cotton. Directly underneath it is a large photograph of Gandhiji. The Northern and Eastern corners of the room are somewhat untidy. A large safe on wooden wheels is kept in one. The materials used for soap making, caustic soda, iron etc. were kept in it. Nandalal Teowari of Phulbahar presented the safe to the Congress Committee. In the other corner is a carding bow; it leans against the wall. Another bow hangs from a beam in the ceiling. When cotton is carded the two bows are tied together. The Ashram *kirtan* started with a song composed by Father himself. The first line is: "You, Sons of the Country, do not know Gandhiji.

Never have you heard of him." Mother entered the hall swinging a censer. Incense filled the room with fragrance. She laid a garland in front of Gandhiji's photograph, set the censer down beside it and withdrew to one side. Then she seated herself and folded her hands. Father dimmed the lantern and began to sing. Sahadeo and other Biharis sang the *kirtans* in Bengali, pronouncing the words badly. The first song came to an end. Mother bowed to the floor and stood up. She would have to see to the food for all these people. Who was to cook if she sat and listened to the singing? When Dada and I were boys we both used to participate in the *kirtan*. We kept on for some years even after our initiation and the sacred thread ceremony. I stopped not long after Dada did. How Mother cried about it! "Your Father is grieved when you two do not join him. Can't you show him some consideration even if you don't want to sing?" Dada did not answer her. Dada did not take part in the *kirtan* at home but people in the larger villages we visited often arranged *kirtan* parties for our entertainment. They were in the habit of doing this for Father and did the same for his sons Dada never showed the slightest annoyance. When I showed my discomfiture he signed to me to keep quiet, to be patient.

A meeting had been arranged at Khagha market in Baisi county. Not a single person came. Sahadeo planted the Congress flag and shouted 'Inquilab Zindabad!' and 'Gandhiji ki jai!' many times. Drums and gongs were carried around the village and all the devices we knew to attract people to the market-place were employed. But people did not come. Then the local Congress worker, Ramdatta Mandal, sent for the milkmen's *kirtan* party. With it was brought a single-reed harmonium. In ten minutes the whole market was there. Then we made our speeches quickly. The people were busy with the business that had brought them to the market. They didn't understand the difference between a speech by a follower of Gandhiji and a harangue by a vendor of ringworm medicine. They had come to market and wanted to take a look at all the fun going on, Gandhiji along with the rest. Some of them had seen Gandhiji or participated in the Salt Satyagraha. What could these young fellows, so green, tell them that was new? Nine-tenths of what we said was not understood at all. Pasturage! Let us find it for them. Rebate of land rent? Let us get it for

them. Let us keep the landlord's buffaloes from grazing on the standing crops. These were what they would understand. Instead we spoke of membership, a trick to raise subscriptions. When we were ministers we had a law passed enforcing payment of arrears of land rent. In the market-places we proclaimed that no one would have to spend more than four annas on a petition. They had to spend twenty times that much. Half of the petitions were dismissed. The petitions were submitted to Punyadeoji, one of Gandhiji's men, for him to try and do something about them. He charged eight annas for each petition. It's only because of the Mastar Saheb that anything is done for Gandhiji in this district. More than half of us are, otherwise, thugs It's true. The constructive work of the Congress is entirely in the hands of the wealthier peasants. They want to free themselves from the oppression of the landlords but they do not want to stop oppressing those who are beneath them, at their mercy, the landless labourers and the sharecroppers. All the laws passed by the Congress for the benefit of the helpless peasant have been flouted by them. Even a sincere worker like Sahadeo drew up a false deed of agreement in order to prevent sharecroppers from acquiring a permanent right.

The old woman from Dahibhat village who used to come so often to the Congress office sat there and cried. She had a large goitre. "You're the only one," she said to Dada, "who can do anything for me. Can such injustice be done while the sun and the moon are still in the sky? Sahadeo's elder brother, Kapiladeo, wants my land. He wants it all. Nearly fifty bighas. The land is close to his house, you see. It will make an excellent tobacco field. That is why he wants it. My husband was an oilman. My son, a grown-up young man, died before his father. His wife was expecting a baby. My husband followed my son within a year and my daughter-in-law also died shortly afterward. My grandson fell ill and died before he was a year old. He was in his Granny's lap the whole of the twenty-four hours. How much medicine he was given! How many kinds of treatment were tried! At the very last I refused to let them give him an injection. It would have hurt him too much. Now I think he may have lived if I had let them do it. I could not prevent him from dying. A milkman's son, a neighbour, died not long afterwards. His name was Gore. Kapiladeo called the

Council of Five and accused me of being a witch. He said that I, having finished my own family, cast a spell on Gore. O stupid! Can I still be hungry, if I'm a witch, after devouring my husband, son, grandson and daughter-in-law? In order to drive me out of the village Radho, Sanicharan, Chedi and others, instigated by Kapiladeo, burnt my house down that night. I wasn't able to save a handful of rice. But I'm not going to abandon my homestead. I'm told that Kapiladeo has obtained a decree from the District Court, in order to take my land away from me. Am I an inexperienced young girl? Can they make me believe it? My land is in Dahibhat village. How can a decree be issued in Purnea? Is it possible?" She said many such things, beating her head and weeping. The Mastar Saheb has no time, she said, or she would ask him to accompany her to Dahibhat. The only one to whom she could turn was Bilu Babu. Dada and I tried, we did what we could, but we could not set the matter right. When we went to Dahibhat Kapiladeo feasted us but he would not listen to what we said. Again and again he answered that he also was a member of the Congress, that he was a follower of Gandhiji, that he had given one of his brothers to the cause, that he contributed a share of the rice needed for the Ashram every year. The truth is in a large family that has holdings in common everybody looks after things. The lands don't require very special attention. It's better for some members of the family to join the Congress than to sit at home, intriguing in the village. This is the way Kapiladeo's mind worked. And by such a 'gift' as much advantage as can be derived from the constructive activities of the Congress, is assured. If his brother could win the favour of the Congress leaders he might become a member of the District Board. And if, for any reason, the Congress began to put pressure on the wealthier peasantry, it could be ignored. The Congress could not do any more than try moral persuasion.

Long afterwards the oilman's wife, in her anger and her grief, said to my brother, "I know Kapiladeo has bought the Police Superintendent. Has he bought you too?" She had much more to say but Sahadeo entered unexpectedly and she stopped. However bitter their relationship might be Sahadeo was a Bhumiya Brahmin, high caste, an important person in the village. How could the humble oilman's wife raise her voice

in his presence? And when we spoke to him about her, he answered, "Kapiladeo is the head of the family. What do I know about it?"

I felt like taking him by the scruff of the neck and throwing him out of the Congress Ashram. I didn't speak to him for a long time afterwards. "What's the good of being angry with him?" Dada said, "The fault lies in the foundations of our social structure."

We realised the futility of our political outlook when we were in the camp jail during the 1930-32 movement. How many discussions, arguments and disagreements we had over it in prison! Despair showed plainly in the faces even of those who would not speak openly of futility The seed bore fruit at last. Dada and I both joined the Congress Socialist party. The incident of the oilman's wife had watered a hidden seed and encouraged it to sprout. I don't know whether that woman is still clinging to her homestead or not. But her tears washed all hesitation and doubt out of our hearts. A thin beam of light, a pale ray of dawn, touched the half-conscious hopes we cherished, shining through a small window. From then on Dada and I worked enthusiastically. We were members of the same party. He was not only a colleague, a comrade; he was my brother. How many common memories, sad and happy, thread our lives together! He was always concerned for me, anxious for anything that would be good for me, for what would give me pleasure. He didn't go to college himself. That was a bad disappointment for him! But he spent the allowance he earned doing relief work during the Bihar earthquake for my college expenses. He found his satisfaction in me. When the relief work was over and the equipment auctioned he bought me a cycle. These are small things. They ought not to be mentioned in connection with Dada's affection for me. To drag them up is to demean it. He worried if I got a headache. I noticed he didn't eat the molasses he was given in prison because he knew that unless I have something sweet after my rice my meal is unfinished. In jail he washed my unde clothes regularly. If I protested he'd say, "Don't bother. You're not accustomed to doing it." I didn't insist. It seemed to me that I had a right to his care, that there was nothing unusual in Dada doing it for me.

But . . . has Dada no claims on me? It's possible. Why possible? He most certainly has. But their place is outside politics. In politics I am not Nilu and Bilu is not my brother. Personal affairs have to be left out of politics and every step tested by the touchstone of logic. Anything I do must be judged from my party's standpoint.

Let the world think what it likes of me. Dada will understand me correctly. There's no trace of bigotry in him.

When Dada and I were arrested in 1940 we were both members of the Congress Socialist Party. What a change came in the course of a few months' imprisonment! I met Chandradeo for the first time in that ward, at the base of the breadfruit tree. He used to hold classes there, on a blanket spread on the ground. I began to borrow books from him, to attend his lectures, sit in his classes. I can see it all now. His infallbile logic forced my head down. It seemed to me that a curtain was slowly being pulled away from my eyes. The standpoint from which I looked at politics while under Dada's influence was sickly, jaundiced, wrong—it was the emotional gush of the opportunist lower middle class. There is no place in it for the unfettered exhilaration of those who have lost everything. They cannot see beyond nationalism. Before I joined Chandradeo's party I thought of talking it over with Dada. I was on the point of doing so. In the end I didn't, ostensibly because of a certain diffidence and actually because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to counter his arguments. Yet I felt in my heart that his reasoning was wrong. If I could have gone to Chandradeo for each answer in order to repeat it to Dada it might have been possible. In the end I joined without telling him. And why should I ask him anyway? Must I be a minor in my politics forever? A barrier was thrown up between us and it has remained there ever since. A political worker lives in his party. Outside it he can have no existence, his personal life must be effaced completely. I've tried to avoid Dada. We talk only about family matters. I'm afraid of what my party may think. Dada is a prominent leader of a rival organisation! My party certainly would not approve of intimacy with him. Nothing might be said to me but they would discuss it among themselves. Members of other political parties were also in the prison. Each group thought that the other groups had

spies among them. No matter how much care one took, to keep something secret the others were sure to hear about it. Jail walls have ears.

Dada, noticing my diffidence, avoided me also. When I came back from class I always found that my bed had been shaken down and made up freshly. I felt the touch of his loving hands in the cleanliness of the bed. But I only got an opportunity to speak to him on days a letter from our parents came. A postcard from Mother would arrive. I'd read it and leave it on Dada's bed. "Whose letter?" he'd ask, "Is it from Mother?" "Yes," I'd answer. Dada read out the letter. "Don't drink tea on an empty stomach in the morning. Take a mild purgative now and then. The best thing is roasted wood apple if you can arrange to get it. I'm anxious for your health. You always get dysentery in jail. It's not difficult for security prisoners to get preventive medicines. If you need money don't hesitate to write for it, I'll manage to send you some." Dada was laughing. "Mother!" he exclaimed. The dimple showed in his left cheek. How many things I would have liked to talk over with him frankly! In the old days we'd have talked a long time about Mother. But I only said, "Yes." My heart was overflowing with things I wanted to say but my hesitation froze them. A hard lump formed. As children we used to sleep under the same quilt. We told no end of stories to each other. And now, after a brief 'yes', no words came. The discomfiture of having nothing to say showed in our eyes and faces. I had to find an excuse to do something and leave him in order to conceal it.

It was the day of my transfer to Deuli. Dada was not going; only a few were being sent. He packed my trunk before I left. In the bottom he put a palm leaf fan. Mother had stitched a frill around the edge. "Nilu, Bilu, Pilu, Pilu" was embroidered in one corner. She must have done it in an unguarded moment. I don't know what she was thinking of when she wrote "Pilu, Pilu,". Dada put his fountain pen into my pocket. It's still there....

"Babu Saheb, are you asleep?" the Subahdar is standing beside me.

"No, why?" Why has he left his stool and come outside the gate? "Is your duty over?"

"Yes, no, I'm not on night duty. Officials are coming early in the morning so I thought I might as well sleep here. The last

time a hanging took place the Saheb came on his rounds. Big lights are placed all around the gallows and the place kept brightly lit. Like day. Four warders are on duty there. It's jail business. All kinds of prisoners, all kinds of warders! If anybody tampers with the mechanism for a little money it may not be detected in time. If there is trouble over an execution everybody, from the Saheb down to the warder, will get a bad blot on his service record. The entire responsibility in these cases should be given to the Head Warder, inside. I don't know what that officious fellow said to the Saheb but the Saheb is annoyed with me. The Saheb is new to this department. He doesn't know anything about the jail rules, much less understand them. I saw a lot of sahebs like him during the war. And I've eaten a lot of oranges that the memsahebs gave me. And now, for no fault of my own, I have to put up with blame because I have to eat..."

The Subahdar obviously wishes to say something. This is merely a preamble.

"Where are you going now?" I ask.

"How can a fellow sleep with all these mosquitoes around! I made up a bed in the office room but it's very hot. Mosquitoes must be biting you too. I've decided to go home for a cup of tea. It's a bad habit I acquired during the war. Why don't you come with me? What's the use of letting the mosquitoes bite you all night? Nokhe Singh doesn't live with his family. You can spend the night in his quarters. We can't do anything to relieve your mental pain but why shouldn't we do as much as possible for you otherwise? We have children of our own. We're not foreigners."

"Don't trouble yourself," I answer, "I'm quite comfortable here. There aren't any mosquitoes. Why should I go wandering about so late at night?"

His consideration moves me. Brushing my protests aside he has almost pulled me to my feet I begin to pick up the blanlets. "Give some of them to me," he says, "Let me help you carry them."

"They aren't all that heavy!" I protest.

Of the four blankets he takes three, leaving me to carry one "The quarters are not far," he says.

Crossing the road we pass the doctor's residence and stop

in front of the warders' barracks. There are not many houses. Only the senior warders are given separate quarters. All the others live in the barracks. The Subahdar has gone up to a door and knocked.

"Why! Look at that! It's locked!" he exclaims, "Babu, I forgot completely. Nokhelal is on duty. I've troubled you for nothing."

"It's all right," I answer, "It's not far. I'll go back."

"Wait, let me bring you a light."

"Oh, don't bother. There's no need for a light." A hoarse rough voice wounds the night, breaking the hush, "Left turn!" The distance softens the voice a little. The sound comes from inside the jail. The warders are being changed. I didn't hear them two hours ago. I was sitting in front of the gate then. Is the gate soundproof? How is it that, though I am farther away now than I was then, I hear the voice so distinctly?

I've come back to the jail gate and spread my blanket on the low wall again. A single blanket. The other three are with the Subahdar. Was this why he showed me so much sympathy? Was this why he was so anxious to take me down to his house in the middle of the night? If anyone wants to take a blanket out of prison he has to give three blankets to those who assist him. This is the accepted practice with everything. Unless it is followed there is a likelihood of being caught. The Subahdar has found it impossible to resist the temptation of being able to take three blankets home without all this trouble. And it being wartime now....

I'm sitting in my old place. The part the jail plays in the huge oppressive machinery of the state is not negligible. Wheels within wheels—I am sitting in front of one of them. The gate is inexorable, stern and lifeless. Everything proceeds in a relentless routine, like the hands of a clock. The Subahdar at the gate and the Head Warder in the central tower are two small jewels set, like the jewels of a watch, at the important points of this vast engine of torture.

The monotony of jail life is unbearable. These four or five hours are enough! To go down to the warders' quarters and come back, even in this darkness, is something of a relief. Again a group of warders. The door opens and shuts by the clock. What would happen if all this was done without a war-

der at the gate? Mechanisation is certainly possible where the same motions are made over and over again. It's better to have a machine.

A warder is coming down the steps from the upper storey. The Jailor Saheb's living quarters are over the gate. In front of them is a broad verandah. An armed guard is on duty there. It is this guard who sounds the gong at regular intervals all through the day and the night, summer and winter, rain and sunshine. Every hour has to be struck. The gong is sounded once also when the Saheb enters the prison, twice when a distinguished visitor arrives. It may be done to warn the people inside, to give them time to conceal their misdoings. And occasionally there is the alarm signal. The gong sounds continuously, without a break. From a distance the clanguor is like that of church bells on Sunday. The church anxiously guards its flock. The alarm signal protects the interest of a class.

The gong warder, having performed his very responsible duty for two whole hours, passes proudly out of the gate. The sentry outside asks him, "Why are you so late? The new warder arrived a long time ago!"

"Nothing to speak of. I was asked to waken the Jailor Saheb at one o'clock. I supposed that he wanted to go on his rounds. But when I knocked at his door he was furious. "What're you shouting about?" he demanded. He's a high official. Whatever he does is right. At first he was angry and then he told me to tell the next warder to wake him up at three o'clock. The new warder may forget to do it. That'll be fine. The Saheb can call him in person. That'll teach him."

"Wait a minute," the sentry is saying, "Where're you going? Have some tobacco."

"No thanks, I'm off to bed. Is this the time to chew tobacco?" He keeps on standing there, nonetheless, waiting for the tobacco. He takes his turban off, perhaps because of the heat. He's quite bald.

"Would you like a little oil for your hair?" the gate sentry asks. "The Head Warder left some. It's cooling. It must be oil for B Division prisoners. It's probably been given him by a contractor. Rub some on your bald spot. If hair grows mosquitoes won't be able to bite you any more."

Somehow I didn't expect him to be bald. Mary Stuart's curly hair was famous for its beauty. When she taken to the block people discovered that it was not her own. She wore a wig. I don't remember ever having seen a bald constable before. Policemen always wear turbans. Turbans are as proper to them as matted hair to ascetics.

Dada and I went to see Akhouri Singh, the landowner. His manager had written to us, asking us to come. A cunning Santhal, in order to save his land from the landlord's clutches, made a gift of it to Mahatma Gandhi. The land was next to the fair ground. The tents in which the charm and beauty of women's bodies are peddled were usually erected on the adjacent plot. The fair was growing bigger and bigger. There was a shortage of space on this side. The landowner wanted the Santhal's holding. The Santhal thought he could get Gandhi's men to fight his battle for him and later refuse to release it himself. At first we did not understand what he was about. Father also questioned the advisability of accepting the land. I wrote a letter to the Manager about it. We were invited to meet Akhouri Babu. I didn't recognise him at first when we entered the sitting-room. He was without a head covering and his head was shiny and bald. There was a single long lock towards the back, his pigtail. It was wound round and round in a spiral, rubbed with brilliantine and set on the front of his head. Are rich people always bald? Rameswar Babu, our Mathematics teacher, was. Once, as he was giving us a lesson in geometry, he wrote on the blackboard. 'Take the middle point.' The whole class burst out laughing. Is this why people used to wear wigs? Wearing wigs was fashionable. Akhouri Singh was saying something to the Manager in English. The Manager asked us, "Are you the sons of Mastar Saheb? Congress volunteers have put up a shack on this Santhal's land. I hear they're going to start picketing the tents on the fair ground. Last night, you know, two volunteers were arrested coming out of the tents late at night. Perhaps you are aware of the police regulations. After twelve no one is allowed to leave the tents. Clients must either stay until dawn or come away before midnight. Into whose hands have you fallen? For whom are you fighting? The Santhal will come over to our side at once if we give him two or three bighas of land somewhere else. If it's a fat subscription for the Con-

gress that you want, you can have it but if you go out of your way to get mixed up in this...."

"Adab, Babu Saheb."

Why has the gong warder suddenly decided to speak to me before leaving? He's saying, "Day before yesterday noon I was on duty at the condemned cell. The Babu was reading a newspaper." The fellow is giving me news of Dada unasked. I've been wanting to ask for a long time. I feel like going up to one of them every time a batch comes off duty. I haven't been able to do it. Something stops me. They all know about my giving evidence. It was in prison that the trial took place. Who knows what they think of me...

News of Dada in this unexpected way pleases me exceedingly. I ask him many things, in detail. I check everything that I have learned through Nihal Singh. I can't make out whether any special arrangements have been made for his food or not. Has Nihal Singh pocketed all the money I've given him? Has he done nothing at all for Dada? Didn't he buy him a pencil, a pen or anything else? The warder answers all my questions as to when the prisoner gets up, when he takes his bath, how long he paces up and down his cell, when he sleeps. It occurs to me that most of the answers are made by guesswork. He has not really noticed much. One day he saw the prisoner giving curd to the cat. It may be true. True or not it's pleasant to listen to him. At least he has seen Dada. The warder has gone. He's not wearing either puttees or socks. It's so hot. His legs bend down out of his short pants like bows.

A Chinaman's legs. Two moving legs where a devil's shadow ends. Darkness! A bright piece of pavement illuminated by a ray of light from the gate—the wall totally dark—the bars of the gate—once more my eyes turn to the space inside. Again and again my eyes return to the lighted space. Outside it the darkness is immense. The sky is enormous. It's studded with stars. It cannot hold either my eyes or my attention. When one enters the jail gate, he finds himself in this lighted space. The jail office is to the right. There are two rooms on the left, the offices of the Jailor and the Superintendent. Iron netting covers the bars outside the jail office. When relatives of the prisoners come they stand in front of these screened bars. How amazing prison arrangements are! Not even a roof is provided to shelter

those who come for interviews from the sun and rain. The bars are screened to prevent things from being passed in or out. Inexperienced people reach the jail gate only after spending a lot of money and taking a lot of trouble. They're nearly driven to distraction by the formalities involved in the drawing up of an application for an interview and the further expense of getting it granted. When, after crossing all these perilous seas, after waiting for hours and hours, they are at last permitted, for a few minutes, to peer through the screened bars at a shrunken, dishevelled figure in prison clothes, it takes time for them to realise that this is a familiar and much loved person. The insulting talk of the ordinary warders and trusties is showered liberally over them. The prison clothes, the khaki uniforms, the turbans, the bars, the locks, the detectives, combine to create an atmosphere so bewildering that it would be strange if visitors did not feel confused. They are told their time is up before they've had more than an irrelevant word or two with their dear one. An interviewer later remembers only two things that float before his eyes like visions. One is when the prisoner first comes to the bars, eager, shy, with an embarrassed expression. The other is when he is led away, sad, hopeless, helpless. His vain effort to force a smile is more moving than heartbroken weeping.

In 1933 I went to see Father in the Hazaribagh Jail. Aunt Jathaima gave me a box of pastries she had made for him. When I arrived I was told Upper Division prisoners were not given interviews on that day. It was the interview day for C Class. Interviewers were crowding and jostling each other like people at a railway ticket window. A number of prisoners were struggling to get to the bars. It was impossible to make out what was being said by whom to whom in the uproar. An elderly woman was weeping noisily and shouting something in her village dialect. It's doubtful whether her son caught a single word. An old Munda had brought a few quinces and a bag of fried pulse balls. He was pleading with a warder, begging him to give them to his son. The warder kept raising his price. "How can I do it without the doctor's permission? C Class prisoners are not allowed anything from outside. I can't give food to a C Class prisoner for less than a rupee. The doctor's permission will cost another rupee. Why should I do this

sort of thing for nothing? I might get in trouble." After a great deal of bargaining he compromised on a rupee. The poor Munda's whole year's savings probably. The warder tucked the rupee into his turban. Who knows whether the bag of fried pulse balls ever reached its destination!

To the left of the gate, on the wall, is the notice board. A number of white papers are attached to it. I don't know what the notices announce. In other jails only the names of the members of the jail committee are posted there. So many notices! Perhaps the Inspector General of Prisons is coming. Below the notice board is a telephone. Close to it, on the West side, is a weighing machine, the kind they have in stations. And tracks run through the centre of the gate, a narrow gauge line. On the Kishangunge line of the D.H.R. the little engine collided with a cow once. The train was derailed. It happened near Chungipara. Trolleys carry the products of the jail factory along these tracks. Here and there beside them is a blob of dung. An ox cart must have passed. Everybody is flustered and anxious because the Saheb and the Magistrate are coming. It has not occurred to anybody to remove this dung. Perhaps they have thought of it. There is no one to do it before the prisoners come in the morning. Why should a respectable warder do a job so much beneath him? The tracks, the weighing machine, the notice board, the telephone, the cobblestoned floor, give the place the look of a railway station. It seems to me I'm sitting on a blanket spread on the platform of a railway station, waiting for a train.

I told Sourin to inform the Cremation Committee of the Ramakrishna Mission. They are to be present in the morning at the Khariabag Ghat. The town is small. Nearly everybody has dealings with the government in one way or another, as lawyers, vakils, muktears, clerks. They all have to conduct themselves according to the mood of their masters. What if they don't come? They may be afraid of the police. What then? The jail people will carry out the cremation. They give five rupees and the loan of a lorry to everybody. Sourin wants to take out a procession. I went to see the Magistrate last Thursday. He agreed to let me take the body on the condition that there would be no procession. People may not listen to me. If they go to the ghat it won't matter how large a crowd there

is. I'll have kept my word. But can I forbid anybody to take out a procession? Dada was the secretary of the Jute Worker's Union, the president of the Ekka Driver's Union. The members of these unions don't take orders from anybody. And is the promise I made to the Magistrate so very important? No. Let there be a procession. For Bilu Babu, a martyr, for Dada, the Mastar Saheb's son! If no procession is taken out for him why take out any at all for anybody? Cars, horses, a vast throng —garlands, flowers - *devdaru* leaves—the holy water of the Ganges sprinkled from houses along the route, palm leaf fans thrown from the upper storeys for the possession of which there is a scramble, the crowd, pushing—rushing—pressing forward —the serpentine movement of an endless stream of men! Silence. No slogans, no singing, no lamentation. None of the wildness of a disorderly mob. The apathy of an overwhelming grief, the numbness of mourning. An infinite sympathy with all but one member of a patriotic family. The latent curse of outraged national pride will be present. The watchful flame of frustrated fury will burn beneath the chill ashy surface. This peaceful, harmless crowd can, at a sign, turn violent, wild, and rend me to pieces. There'll be a complete strike. The procession will pause in front of Aunt Jathaima's house. Will Aunt Jathaima be able to push the flowers from the face and look at it? Only the face will be uncovered. I'll tie a cloth around the throat. Sandalwood paste and flowers will disguise the dreadfulness of the face. A few drops of bloodstained foam may ooze from a corner of the mouth. Dried, it will look like red sandalwood paste. No, the procession must not be allowed to stop in front of Aunt Jathaima's house, not on any account. The vast throng at the cremation ground—red turbans everywhere—the Magistrate and Superintendent with their bodyguards getting out of their car. Manatida, so experienced in these matters, will build the pyre. He is beyond all emotion. "Is this the municipality's wood?" he'll ask, "it's been lying around since they first started stocking wood for cremations. It's rotten. The Municipality is a third-rate one. Where will they find the means to purchase good wood?" Manatida has to have a bottle of country liquor on the days he handles cremations. Everybody knows it. Will he expect me to give him liquor today too? What a scramble there'll be for the ashes!

The women will tie some in the ends of their saris. They'll smear a little on the foreheads of their children. Will any mother, at this time, be able to clasp her son to her breast and say, 'May you be like Bilu Babu!' Never. Once Dada and I came home with chicken pox. Mother sat beside us with her fan. Our cots were side by side. "Are you two going to drive me out of my mind?" Mother exclaimed in an effort to conquer her anxiety. She said the truth. The crowd will suddenly go out of control. *'Jai Gandhiji ki jai! Jai Bilu Babu ki jai! Noukarsahi Nash Ho!'* The harsh shouting fills the sky. That coolie from the mill will take over the leadership at exactly the right moment. How is it possible for a person so thin to shout so strongly? "Bande!" he cries and the crowd answers, "Mataram!" He cries, "Bilu Babu ka—" and the crowd adds, "Jai!" He raises his right arm high with each cry as though pointing a finger at some unknown person in the heavens. The police push the crowd aside. A clubbing is not necessary. The coolie leader is hoarse. He'll raise his arm again and again and try to shout but the only sound he'll be able to make will be like the sound of air hissing out of a punctured rubber tyre.

Over there, in that corner of the jail enclosure, on the side near the Superintendent's office, many kinds of instruments hang on the wall, punitive instruments, handcuffs, chains, balls, bars, fetters. These are used to correct jail offences. A prisoner may speak angrily to a warder, one may draw the attention of the Jailor Saheb to the fact that the iron spoon with which the rice is measured holds three and a half chattacks, not five, another may protest that pumpkin curry has been served for three months running, some one may have picked a wood apple off the tree. The possible offences are innumerable. Over a hundred bamboo canes are standing in a large earthen container. Set in holes on a stand next to them are heavy cudgels. Each has a tape loop attached to the top so that it can be swung from the arm. Truncheons hang on the wall above them. In the righthand corner is a line of red buckets on hooks, the word FIRE is written above them. A pile of flares lie on one side, rags twisted around bamboo sticks. When, at night, the number of prisoners is totalled and found incorrect, these rags are soaked in kerosene, set alight, and carried by the warders as they search for the missing man. They could use lanterns and

flashlights but no, all these....

The escape of a prisoner was being rehearsed. The alarm was sounding and the Saheb was standing in the Central Tower. The warders, each eager to display his skill before his superior, were running about with lighted flares. The latrines and the trees received special attention. Yogilal, one of the warders, called out, "Superintendent Saheb! O, Superintendent Saheb! Has a prisoner really got away or is this practice?" The Superintendent came to our ward after the search was over. We were all on our cots like good boys. The affair did not go far....

The gong has struck twelve.

Only three hours more. According to the new summer time the sun does not rise before five-thirty. Then? Their work must be finished before sunrise. The daily life of the jail starts at sunrise. The morning chores have to be finished by seven o'clock. The factory opens at seven. Unless the kitchen fires are lighted at five-thirty how can breakfast be over by seven? The prisoners who are on duty in the kitchen must be given time for their morning toilet. No, it will all be over by five.

What's Dada doing now? Perhaps he's holding on to the bars, staring up at the starry sky, thinking of everything on earth and in heaven. Will he think of me? Dada can never misunderstand me! If only I could have a frank talk with him! I know it's not necessary to explain my behaviour to him but it might have lightened my heart a little. The implementation of his party's programme means, in practice, the strengthening of Facist forces. Doesn't Dada realise that? But something inside me pricks, defeating all my logic. Perhaps it's remorse, the baseless remorse of irrational emotion The members of the local branch of my party also think it was not right for me to give evidence against my brother. Not because it was against Dada. They think our duty is to make our countrymen aware of their mistakes by, if necessary, putting a finger in their eyes. But, they say, it is not part of our duty to hand them over to the police. The rest of the world may think what it chooses but for my own party men to take this attitude to what I have done is the unkindest cut of all. Perhaps I've not understood correctly the subtleness of Marxist doctrine. As long as I was in Dada's party I did whatever he told me. I considered his opinions infallible, scripture. Dada was released from Hazaribagh

Prison in February 1942. Security was being demanded for political prisoners. A High Court judge was in charge. What was his name? He was a Marathi. Justice Bhate. We were brought from Deuli to Hazaribagh the April after Dada's release. I heard that each of us was to be taken to his own province. I was set free on the 18th June. The government felt at that moment it was no longer necessary to keep Anti-Facists in prison. Never was I so happy to be set free! My heart filled with gratitude towards the government for giving me the opportunity to devote myself to the fight against the enemy of the dispossessed, Facism, and, if need be, to give my life, in the fight, with a laugh. Stories of the heroism of the workers in Spain, stories of the great heroism of Red China, Mao Tse Tung's glory and power, the daily talks in Chandradeo's class, all set every nerve in my body afire with enthusiasm. How much there was for me to do in my own district! The people know nothing about anybody except Gandhi and the Mastar Saheb. It was for me to plant a crop of reason on the virgin soil of this blind devotion. I would, of course, have to return to the Ashram once to see Mother. She was so worried over my operation. I decided to begin my work after visiting everybody there. The bus. Kodarma Station. Goya. What mosquitoes there were in the waiting room! Kiul. Sahebgunj. Maniharighat. Katihar. There was no end to the journey!

My over-eagerness has brought me to my present plight. Dada, Mother, public opinion, and most unbearable of all, the disapproval of my party! Mistaken! No. The whole world may be wrong. I have *not* been wrong! What I did has to be judged taking into consideration all the circumstances of the happenings in August 1942. The entire country was suddenly galvanised into action by an electrifying force, driven wild and distracted. Wherever one went it seemed that the doors of an insane asylum had been thrown open. The excited mob could not make up its mind what to do. Miles and miles of railway track were uprooted, iron rails, heavy sleepers and many other things were carried long distances and thrown into rivers. The cutting of telegraph wires and the burning down of wine shops and post offices was entrusted to village boys. Older people did not wish to soil their hands with such trifles. No one had realised before how fragile telegraph wires are or that it is so easy

to break them. Nothing is required, no pliers, no scissors, no billhooks or any other tool. The boys ran a rope over the wires and swung on it. In some places they twisted the wires and jerked them down. The older people wanted more serious occupation, they could not think what. Railway Stations, Land Record Offices, Sub-Registrar's offices, police stations had already been looted and burnt down. They had nothing in hand. The pillars of power crumbled before them wherever they went, symbols of oppression yielded. Officials wheedled them with flattery. Marwaris made liberal donations, unasked, landlord's agents made promises, exemption from land rent was granted for a year and the tax for the services of the night watchman abolished. The crowd was looking for something to do. On the Farabishgunj line the engine driver and the guard obeyed them, running the train up and down what was left of the track. A notice was posted over the ticket window at every station forbidding passengers to buy tickets. Students from Garabaneli school shouted slogans continuously: 'Whose is the train? Ours! Whose is the engine? Ours! Whose is the station? Ours!' A number of people were acting as ticket checkers. Anyone on whom a ticket was found was immediately put out of the train. One passenger had half of a week-end ticket. 'Get out! At once. You don't deserve a free country!' He pleaded with them, claiming it was an old ticket. Nobody listened to him. The train was stopped and he was made to get out. The train was stopped again a little farther on, midway down the line. Teowariji had gone to attend a meeting somewhere down that way. His ox-cart, flying the Congress flag, hove into sight after a two hour's wait. Teowariji got into the train. '*Inqulab Zindabad!*' rent the heavens. The train started. In station after station chairs, tables, sign-boards, clocks and ledgers were dumped together and set alight. Railway employees were, I noticed, sympathetic. No effort was made to prevent what was happening and in many places members of the railway staff actively participated, voluntarily. A student was entertaining the crowd on a platform with a folk dance. At Kasba Station the students of the school and college took turns beating the ticket collector, Bachhi Singh, satisfying a long-standing grudge.

A law court was set up at Chukri Police Station in the name of Mahatma Gandhi. No one was to go to the Government courts

any more. The Police Inspector was arrested and taken to the national jail. He was made a Second Division prisoner. "Feast him well," were the orders, "and let his wife go wherever she likes." The Government Jail was thrown open and the prisoners released. The Congress flag flew over it. The currency in the Government Treasury was burned. From Gorakhpur thana in the West to the East of Purnea the country was in this state! Complete anarchy! Facist rule! An enormous waste of national strength! Uncontrolled, disorderly, short-sighted, yet glorious with the glory of rare and selfless sacrifice. Red turbans, black faces, flushed faces under helmets, guns, tommy guns, nothing dismayed the crowd. The rattle of tommy guns was heard in the market-place at Birgaon some distance away. Boys imitated the rattle from the maize fields. Boys also sounded the station fog signals. They were like people are during the Spring Festival when the country is wild and riotous with excitement. And Dada's party said that this unrestrained fury was the dress rehearsal for a revolution! It was, they said, a revolutionary effort. A revolution in Birgaon! And who was the leader? Vinayak Mishi. He's always mixed up in everything. He acts as priest in the villages round about, gives readings from the scriptures, lectures at the Hindu Mission, reconverts Santhals who have turned Christian, sits beside Congress ministers in their cars when they are in office. He reads palms, casts horoscopes, decides which days are auspicious for weddings, studies the almanac, practises homeopathy, Aryavedic medicine, and prescribes village remedies for various ailments also. He earns a considerable amount from these activities. A thick Hindi book is his capital. Everything is in it, from answers to riddles to quack remedies used by the ignorant poor. He reads the Ramayana in Hindi from this book at prayer time during the Kali Pujah at Dangar Basti. Can a revolution take place under such leadership, with such organisation, at such a time? What made Dada think it possible? I didn't do anything at all wrong. It was my duty. And if I had not given evidence somebody else would have. The Government has plenty of people ready to turn approver. The difference is that I gave evidence out of my political conviction, out of regard for my duty. Others would have given it for money. If only I could talk it all over with Dada frankly! No, it would be useless! I would

say a great many things and Dada would listen patiently, in silence, smiling slightly now and then. He would, at most, interpose a word or two which would muddy everything for me. When that smile of his makes the dimple show in his left cheek I know that all my brilliant analysis has not made the slightest impression on his infallible judgment! The smile is not intended to defeat me; it's only meant to disarm. With one or two simple questions he tumbles the carefully constructed citadel of my logic into the dust.

When I went to see Dada last week I did not ask him the question that trembled in my heart. Was it from diffidence or from fear of being defeated? Did my diffidence spring from a guilty conscience? No, I haven't done anything wrong. Then why do I feel so diffident? It would not have been proper to speak of these things. That was the reason. Can one who has been carried out of the house and laid beneath the sacred basil bush in anticipation of the supreme moment of passing be asked where he has put his will? No, there's no need to explain to Dada. He is sure to have understood me rightly.

A young officer, dressed in short khaki pants, has entered the gate. Perhaps he is the Assistant Jailor on his night round.

Last week I was taken to see Dada in his cell. A C.I.D. man accompanied me. A warder was present. How could I say anything in their presence? I had some fruit tied in a handkerchief. The C.I.D. man joked about it as I entered, "See here!" he said, "I hope there's nothing troublesome in that. Don't make me lose my job. You know what it is to be a Bengali and hold a job in this part of the country nowadays, don't you? I haven't chosen this department." He protested when I offered to untie the handkerchief and show him what was inside. "Forget it. Forget it. I didn't mean that." he said, "And you! We know people for what they are." So even the C.I.D. trusts me. What better certificate can a political worker have? I wasn't prepared for so much. They don't regard me with suspicion any more. Not since Dada's trial. Dada was standing behind the bars of his cell. His hair was dishevelled. He has grown quite thin. His nose is high and straight as a sword. His skin is fairer than ever. Scabies has scarred his hands and feet. The soft look in his eyes, his smile, his full eager look took away all my embarrassment. "What's in the handkerchief?" He was

the first to speak. "Aunt Jathaima has sent it," I answered. The initial difficulty of starting a conversation was over. "Did she? How is Aunt Jathaima? Did she give you any message?" At first I thought I would tell him the truth and say Aunt Jathaima had stopped eating. But why should I burden his affectionate heart more now? "So, so," I said, "She speaks of you often." From his expression I think Dada saw through my effort at concealment. The C.I.D. man said, "The door can be opened. Why don't you sit inside?" "Oh, don't bother." I protested. The warder unlocked the door. I went in and sat down on Dada's blanket. I couldn't ask him anything. My words kept getting lost. Dada must have understood how I felt. He did the talking, asking me many things. I gave the answers. As I left he said, "Go to see Mother." That was the last thing he said to me. And I've not been able to do it. It makes me shudder to think what Mother will say to me, how she will weep! Dada understands me so well! Doesn't he know it's impossible for me to go to see Mother now? He knows my likes and dislikes. Once I asked him to write a poem for me, a poem that would have a meaning. I cannot stomach the complaining drivel of the so-called great poets. So Dada wrote a poem that I could like:

"Full rights for all I demand.
I'll not be satisfied with less.
I look forward to the day
Workers will no longer be oppressed.
Sighs of despair, I, for certain, know
Shall bring the day of reckoning.
A new sun shall rise, smiles
Shine on hunger-weary faces.
No property shall private be,
Nor wealth beyond compare.
In egalitarian states
Thought and work are free.

I don't remember the rest. I had the whole of it by heart. How much I've changed in the last two years! I tried, my utmost to shake off Dada's influence. My unconscious mind has even assisted me by wiping the poem out of my memory. I

hung it on the verandah of Mother's room at the Ashram. Who knows whether it's still there or not! I'd forgotten all about it. I must certainly go and look for it.

"Are you awake, Babuji?"

The Subahdar has returned. His face and eyes show he has been asleep. I sit up hurriedly.

"Keep your seat! Keep your seat! Be comfortable, Babuji."

I don't feel like talking to anybody. The Subahdar has entered the gate. He's going towards the office. Perhaps he'll take up the bed he made in the evening. What's Dada doing now? Maybe he's writing. He is sure to leave letters. Who knows if Nihal Singh bought him writing materials with the money I gave him? It'll be difficult for Dada to keep them in his cell. It must be searched daily. And Dada may not leave letters like the others even if he can find the opportunity to write. His ways are strange! I can't make out what he considers becoming and what he doesn't. I've heard that Marie Antoinette's hair went white the night before her execution. I can't imagine Dada's hair white. He may be sound asleep, unconcerned. As Sir Thomas More laid his head on the block he jokingly said to the executioner, "Be careful not to spoil my beard." That always seemed to me a highly coloured story. But about Dada it would not be an overstatement. How many stories I've heard of how political prisoners have behaved as they were led to the gallows! One fainted. Another cursed the Superintendent. Another blamed God and cursed Him. Another prayed and yet another vainly tried to make a speech. One mounted the steps singing the song which summons us to give our heads. He stood on the trap door without a tremor. To Dada all these things will certainly seem to a greater or lesser degree theatrical. He won't do anything of the kind. He'll smile his gentle, mocking smile. Before that smile the Superintendent will drop his eyes, the Magistrate will look away, the Jailor will glance unnecessarily at his watch and switch his flashlight off and on, off and on. The impassive convict who has agreed to play the despicable part of hangman for a paltry five rupees and the reduction of his sentence—the traitor-executioner—will feel his pulse quicken too. I can't imagine Dada behaving in any other way.

Khat! Khat! Khat! Somebody is coming down the stairs

from the room above the gate. It's the masculine tread of a strong man, blind with pride. Earth! Understand. No one but me has any power over this piece of ground! No one else can command! I am all in all here. This is his attitude. I've been waiting for this sound a long time. A stout man dressed in khaki has descended. The sentry at the gate clicks his heels and salutes. He straightens up to stand at attention. The inside warder salaams and opens the door in the gate. The Subahdar is standing in front of the gate. His teeth are showing, discoloured, white and black. The effort he is making to smile ingratiatingly is plain. The Subahdar salaams and the Jailor asks, "Is everything in order?"

"Yes, Sir," he answers as though he has been busy the whole night attending to every detail in person.

The Jailor's eyes fall on a blob of dung, lying splattered and hesitant beside the trolley line. He turns his foot over and looks at the bottom of his boot. His irritation shows in his face. The Subahdar is staring at the boot with frightened eyes. No, the dung has not dirtied it. He breathes a sigh of relief.

"Why hasn't that dung been removed?"

"Sir, we couldn't get hold of a prisoner."

"Why not? No cart passed through the gate after lock-up."

Nothing more is needed. The inside warder hurries forward and undertakes the job himself. The Subahdar's day is not going to be a pleasant one, starting with this incident so early in the morning. The Jailor opens the inner door and enters the prison.

"I'd better see how things are inside!" he exclaims. "No responsibility of any kind can be given to you people without worrying. See that the Saheb's room and mine are in order."

"Yes, Sir, you need not mention it, Sir. I've put everything in order."

The Subahdar turns to the warder and demands, "Why are you standing there like an owl? Go and see if the Saheb's room has been cleaned! How difficult it is to manage with these Bengalis! They're new. Cart drivers and peasants and shepherds have been taken on since all this trouble with the Congress started! They don't understand a word you say to them. And as for work!"

With their subordinates they all behave alike, from the

highest to the lowest.

Four bells have sounded. Another batch of warders has come. There are twenty-two in each batch. The scene is re-enacted; I've got it by heart in a single night. The entrance hall is like a station platform. People get out of the train, other people get in. There's noise and shouting, confusion, then everything as before. Is Dada standing in his cell, holding to the bars, awaiting the supreme moment? Has he heard the four bells? The sound has set the air in motion and its waves must have gone as far as the condemned cell, right into it. Why can't my thoughts send waves there too? Of whom will Dada think last, of Mother, of Aunt Jathaima, of me? Why should he think of me? Certainly he will. His thoughts of me will be sad, full of hurt, reproach. It's something beyond all argument, all logic. It'll be impossible for me to stay in Purnea after this. How can I face Aunt Jathaima? How can I show myself to our neighbours? I've somewhat overcome the first embarrassment, the embarrassment I felt after giving evidence. But how can I go to Mother? It's impossible! I've been trying to prepare myself for this day for months, for Dada's last day. The idea of it is not unanticipated, sudden. The vision of it has weighed on me, oppressively. Day by day I read out the report of the Pakur murder case to Mother and Dada, explaining it to them. Mother exclaimed, "How can such a thing happen between brothers?" And today! I've ignored public opinion. But why is my heart breaking? Public opinion can be ignored but the dumb agony in Mother's eyes and Aunt Jathaima's silent condemnation cannot be Why not? Sentimental nonsense! There are countless things for me to do in this pain-racked society. Can one on whom the responsibility of wiping away the accumulated tears of centuries, worry about a few hot tears shed in the narrow corner of his home? Those can be dried with the end of a homespun sari. A soiled pillow and an old rag will absorb them like drops of water on hot sand. How can I drop behind because of them? I'm already much worried about my own future. What I am going to achieve is more important to me than what is happening to Dada . . .

I remember the dead face of Kanailal in his photograph. Will Dada be put on an iron stretcher as he was? The eyes were half-open. The face was not distorted by the last desperate

struggle to draw a breath, the eyeballs were not protruding. He looked like a man sleeping. His expression was peaceful. The throat was swollen. That was all. It was blue with congested blood.

The Jail doctor, Aghar Babu, has entered the gate. His haste has tired him. He has no time to look around. There are five or six doctors connected with the prison. The Civil Surgeon lives in the town. He has no residential quarters because, before the war, the doctor was also the Superintendent. Why has Aghar Babu come? "Why are you here, Doctor Saheb?" the Subahdar is asking him.

"Oh, I just came."

The Subahdar understands. Everybody is eager to display a sense of duty before the Saheb today. Aghar Babu knows me. Luckily he hasn't seen me. Who knows what he might not have asked? He's gone into the office. The Jailor Saheb has returned. The light is turned on in his room. The fan is revolving. The Superintendent, dressed in a white tennis shirt and short pants, has arrived. With him is a brown and white bull terrior. The warders look anxious. Salute! Attention! The dog came up to me before it went inside, who knows why. The inside warder is holding the door half open for the dog. They're all trying to show that they are no less devoted to the master's dog than to the master himself. The Jailor has come out of the room to receive the Saheb. Aghar Babu is also standing there. The Subahdar, in order to show his regard for the Jailor, is standing at a respectable distance. The Saheb laughingly relates some story as he turns his flashlight off and on, off and on. The dog is going back and forth between the passage and the office, sniffing the flares. It goes up to its master as if to report something and then goes off again. The sound of the lorry shatters the quiet of the night. It's coming. Bho! Bho! How loud the horn is! Dada, Mother, Father, everybody must surely have heard it. A van has pulled up not far from the gate. Now the door will open and armed police jump out one after another. About turn! Right wheel! No, nobody gets out. Are they going to wait in the van? The driver turns off the lights. The road and the staff quarters are once more plunged in darkness. The Saheb's dog is barking. It has slipped through the bars of the gate and come outside. The

dog has come to see what has disturbed the peace of this, his kingdom. Why should lights blaze out so suddenly? Why should they go out again?

The wheels turn in their grooves, day and night, at a slow but relentless pace. Some poor stupid wretch once, a long time ago, dared to raise his head and stand rashly, futilely, erect in front of them. And in order that the act should not be repeated large and small wheels all over the country were set in motion. The state finds no peace in merely effacing all traces of the incident and its hero. It does not rest, it cannot rest, until all the dream-filled young hearts which he stirred are forever crippled by fear, numbed. Police stations are set up, superintendents of police appointed, criminal courts established and courts of sessions opened, government lawyers, judges, witnesses, witness for the prosecution like Nilu, the jail staff—one after another beads were added to the chain, each bead a different colour, a chain that leads to a pre-determined objective. How much longer is it now until that objective, that supreme moment, the aim and end of it all, is reached? How can only the traitor be blamed? The moral responsibility for this barbarity belongs to all alike from the judge down to the warder. In this age of specialisation no one looks outside his allotted sphere. It's enough if he can keep the particular part of the machine for which he is responsible working well. What need does he have to inquire into the source of the machine's power? He's satisfied with the part that comes to him on the conveyor belt. Every hand that has touched the matter up to this point has endeavoured to conceal the naked barbarity of a devilish state. But now a point has been reached where no further pretence is required. Crush or be crushed! The car of Juggernaut will roll on in the pride of its own motion. It does not take the slightest interest in knowing whether some unfortunate, responding to a cry in the night, is crushed beneath its wheels or not. The steam-roller of class interest has to be driven constantly back and forth over the roads. If it pauses weeds will lift their heads. Dada built the road to the Ashram with his own hands. It's lined with beds of tube-roses. Whenever he had a little time to spare he would take a spade and weed the road. A white undershirt of homespun....

Another car has driven up. A uniformed orderly opens the

door. A gentleman wearing a coat and hat, with a cigar in his mouth, gets out. The Civil Surgeon.

"Am I late?" the Civil Surgeon asks, "You're not waiting for me, are you?"

"No, no, the Magistrate hasn't come yet". The Superintendent glances at his wrist watch. He is annoyed. "Come in," he says, "let's sit inside." Chairs scrape. The low murmur of conversation drifts out of the room. Again the blare of a horn. A car drives up and stops. A young man, wearing short pants, jumps out. He hurries through the jail gate. The Jailor Saheb receives him.

"No, no, you're not late. We came early. The Civil Surgeon and the Superintendent are waiting for you inside. Come in and sit down."

He didn't have to enter the room. The Superintendent, the Civil Surgeon, and others have come out. They are ready to go into the prison. One by one they pass through the inner gate. The door is low and each has to bow his head as he steps through. I've heard there was a door like that at the Moghul court in Delhi. Some Raja thought it humiliating and refused to go in. The darkness within engulfs each figure in turn. What if I were to run away from this place now? I won't be able to look at the body. No one will notice if I run away. I'll have to show the Magistrate's order to the jail authorities. They won't give me the body unless I do. Where is the paper? It's not in any of my pockets! What's happened to it? Have I left it at home? I must go for it immediately It's better that way. It's better for me not to find the paper. What if I catch the next train to Patna or Bombay? It's imperative for me to meet the leaders of my party. No, here's the paper, in this pocket. I put it here myself yesterday. Where could it get to? I went through all my pockets.... I couldn't find it anywhere.

I notice that the Subahdar is watching me. He has turned his eyes away. He cannot look me in the face.

I think people have begun to gather in the distance. Many may not have come for fear of the armed police. Otherwise a great crowd would have collected by now. The door of a bungalow has opened. Perhaps everybody is curious to see the body. Dada has a mole on his throat.... Every winter a group

of Punjabi monks come to Patna, astrologers, dressed in yellow robes. One of them came to the Ashram. He smiled, bowed and announced with a bad accent, "I'm a fortune teller." He insisted upon looking at Dada's hand in spite of his protests. "You'll live to be eighty," he said. The hypocritical liar! Dada laughed at him and said, "This is the Congress office. I'll not be able to pay you anything for your trouble."

What if Dada faints? Will they put him on the gallows in that state? Can they do that?

A trusty and a guard quarrel for the possession of the noose ... I remember that time in prison ... they tried to cut it up into small pieces. The blunt iron slipped on the smooth greased rope. Those who get a piece are considered lucky. A piece is a talisman It confers power to influence people, to dominate them.

The inner gate has opened! The Superintendent, the Magistrate, the Civil Surgeon, the Jailor, Aghar Babu, the Assistant Jailor, a warder, another warder, another, the dog, a warder, a warder ...

They are forcing smiles, trying to pretend that they are not upset by something as inconsequential as a hanging. It's only made them late for their morning cup of tea. The Superintendent and the Civil Surgeon both invite the Magistrate to have tea with them. The gate is opened. The dog goes ahead, showing the way. The two cars follow them up to the bungalow and pull up to wait. The lorry driver gets ready, taking his place behind the steering wheel. The warder is still holding the inner door slightly ajar. Now I think it's coming. Now.

"Well, well, Nilu Babu. Good morning. What are you doing here so early? Have you come to try for an interview? The C.I.D. won't be here before eight o'clock. Come home with me! There's plenty of time to have tea. What do you say?"

Aghar Babu gave me no opportunity to answer. I manage to stammer with difficulty, "No, I've not come for an interview. I've come ... today ... Dada ..." No words come. My lips are trembling. I cannot make a sound. A strong hand seems to grip my throat. Tears burn in my eyes! I turn away and push the Magistrate's order into his hands. I fumble. Aghar Babu is reading it. I wipe my tears.

"Ah! Why didn't you say so! Haven't you heard?"

He throws his arm around my neck.

"The Government has waived the death sentence indefinitely."

What's the man saying? Has Aghar Babu gone out of his mind? I catch hold of his hands. He goes on speaking.

"All those condemned to death for sabotage during the August 1942 movement in India and elsewhere, except in military areas, have had their sentences waived indefinitely. Some executions were carried out before the orders were passed. Those convicted of murder have not been exempted of course. Today an ordinary prisoner was executed. He was in Cell No. 3. The Order came the day before yesterday. Your brother was not taken out of Cell No. 1. The Saheb said there was no need to bother. That's the cause of this misunderstanding. The prisoners are not informed of the actual date of execution beforehand. It's against the rules. The Jail staff draw conclusions by inference. You've been given wrong information . . . "

I have lost all power of speech. I feel quiet, very, very, quiet. The blood has stopped pounding in my veins. Not a leaf is stirring. The planets have forgotten to revolve in their courses. They are standing still. I behold a vision of the earth, Aparna, the earth who is the mother of heroes. I'm afraid to draw a breath.

My pulse is beginning, very softly, to beat again. Birds call. Leaves stir once more, rocking gently in the breeze that heralds the dawn. The adorable earth awakes, rousing herself to the rhythmic movements of life. Usha, goddess of dawn, pours her sweet pink light over the stone masonry of the prison.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO MAY, 1943

1939	August 20	Defence of India Bill passed.
	September 3	War declared on behalf of India by British Raj.
	October	Failure of talks between Gandhi and Viceroy.
	November 8	All Congress Ministries resigned in protest against involvement of India in war without consent of her people
1940	February	Failure of interview between Gandhi and Viceroy
	June	Fall of France.
	July	Demand for National Government pressed and non-violence repudiated as weapon against foreign aggression by Working Committee of Indian National Congress
	August	Congress rejects Viceroy's invitation to join Executive Council.
	October 11-13	Individual Satyagraha launched as moral protest against War
	October 31	Jawaharlal Nehru arrested, sentenced to four years imprisonment.
	December	Maulana Azad arrested, sentenced to 18 months imprisonment.
	December	Satyagraha suspended for a year as goodwill gesture for Christmas
		Satyagrahis released all over India. 25,000 had been arrested and fines worth 6 lakhs rupees imposed.
		Gandhi resigned from leadership of Congress.
		Pearl Harbour
1942	January	Gandhi resumes leadership of Congress on own terms.
	March 7	Fall of Rangoon
	March 22	Cripps Mission
	April 5	Japanese bomb Colombo, Vizagapatam and Coconada.
	April 12	Sir Stafford Cripps departs after failure of Mission.
	May 26	Allahabad Office of the All India Congress Committee raided.
	June	Louis Fischer's visit. 'A Week With Gandhi.'

	July 6	Working Committee of Congress passes 'Quit India' Resolution.
	August 8	All India Congress Committee passes 'Quit India' Resolution.
	August 9	Gandhi and other members of Working Committee arrested under Defence of India Rules. Hundreds of Congress leaders arrested all over the country.
	August 15	Death of Mahadev Desai in detention.
	September	Central Assembly demands immediate release of Gandhi and others.
	November	Viceroy rejects requests from Rajagopalacharya and Shyama Prasad Mukherji to meet Gandhi.
1943	January 6	All India Press Strike against restrictions.
	February 10	Fast begun by Gandhi in prison.
	February 19	Leaders of all parties, over 200 persons, meet in Delhi and demand immediate release of Gandhi.
	March 3	Completion of Fast.
	March 10	35 prominent persons in a signed statement demand release of Gandhi.
	April	Sapru proposes Conference. Deputation approaches Viceroy. Leaders refused permission to see Gandhi. Conference abandoned.
	May	Non-party leaders demand impartial tribunal for release of Gandhi and other leaders. Demands for release of Gandhi turned down.

GLOSSARY

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Adab : Muslim greeting between equals.

Aj: A Nationalist Hindi daily.

Almanac: Stepping on or over an almanac, book or paper is thought to show disrespect to Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the arts. Hence such an act brings bad luck in these pursuits.

Amulet: Charm worn on string above elbow or around abdomen. Medicinal herbs and coins are often added to string.

Anna: An Indian coin. Sixteen annas make a rupee.

Aparna: Name of the great mother earth goddess in her benign aspect

Arahar: Lentil used for dhal popular in Bihar.

Aryaveda Vedic system of medicine.

Ashram: A hermitage, a place for study and the practice of a disciplined life. No life is taken within precincts. Vegetarianism is compulsory. No leather is worn on the person by residents except that taken from an animal which has not been killed for the purpose.

Babu: Bengali equivalent of Mr Suffix. Placed after first name.

Bairagi: Wandering ascetic.

Bik rakshasha: A devil in Indian folklore who had a devouring appetite.

Bandar: A revered leader of the Sikhs.

Bande Mataram: 'Hail to the Motherland' The first line of a Sanskrit song composed by a famous Bengali writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterji. Song became an anthem.

Basil: The basil plant is sacred in India and a bush is kept in every village home. It is considered inauspicious for a person to die inside a house. The custom is to carry the dying person out and set him beneath the basil. Such a practice is considered good for the departing soul. Basil has medicinal virtues also. Beads made of basil form the rosary of Vaishnavas.

Betelnut : Chopped areca nut folded into a betel leaf with spices is taken after meals and is considered to

promote digestion. The habit of chewing betel-nut is widespread.

Bhajan: Devotional song. A hymn.

Bhiu Bhavani: The goddess Durga, wife of Siva.

Bhumiya Brahmins: Designation of Brahmins in Bihar who are wealthy landowners.

Bigha: A measure of land equivalent to 5/8 of an acre.

Bihar: Province of India east of Delhi and west of Bengal, which it adjoins. Language spoken is Hindi.

Bihar Earthquake: On January 15, 1934, lasting three minutes, an earthquake took place in north Bihar which affected an area of 30,000 sq. miles. Whole towns in north Bihar were reduced to ruins and many thousands of villagers rendered destitute.

Biswanath: Lord of Creation, name of one of chief deities worshipped at Benares where his temple is famous.

Bratas: Vows performed by women of Bengal. There is a brata for every month of the year. A special lore has grown up around them.

Brindavan: Brindavan is the chief centre of pilgrimage for Vaishnavas. A Brindavan sari is white with a black block print or black and red print of special design.

Chumar: An untouchable caste. Leather workers.

Charak: A religious festival held in honour of Siva on the last day of the Bengali year, in mid-April.

Chicken eggs: Chickens are kept and eaten by Muslims, not Hindus. Chicken eggs are not eaten by Hindus who prefer duck eggs. 'To eat chicken eggs' is an idiom meaning to break caste rules.

C.I.D.: Central Intelligence Department. Secret police.

Congress: Indian National Congress.

Cow: The cow being sacred, cow's milk and curd made from cow's milk is preferred by the devout.

C.S.P.: Congress Socialist Party.

Curd: Yogurt, a favourite and nutritous food.

Dada: Bengali designation for elder brother or one who stands in the relationship of an elder brother to speaker. Didi is the feminine equivalent. 'Da'

	or 'Di' is added to first names to indicate relationship and show respectful and affectionate regard.
Dal or Dhal:	Lentil soup. With rice it forms the staple Indian diet.
Dàroga:	Police sub-inspector.
Dasami Day:	The tenth day of the bright fortnight of the autumn moon. Last day of the four day festival of the Goddess Durga, the greatest annual celebration in Bengal, which falls in late September or early October.
Del Puiah	'Del' means 'heart.' A special kind of Pujah performed in Bengal.
Detention:	Law passed by British Government under which a person may be detained indefinitely in prison without trial.
Devanagari.	The script in which Sanskrit and Hindi is written Literally the writing of the gods.
Devi	Feminine equivalent of Babu. Used after first names of women.
Devdaru:	A tree the leaves of which are used to make garlands etc. on auspicious occasions.
Devi Suresuari Bhagavati Ganga	Sanskrit Invocation of the goddess Durga.
Dewan of Rajkote	Chief Minister of Rajkote, a small princely kingdom.
Dhap kirtan:	A style of kirtan singing. 'Dhap means thud and therefore amuses Nilu.
Dhoti:	A long straight strip of cloth worn as an undergarment by men.
Didi:	Feminine equivalent of Dada.
Dihowar	A local village deity.
Dome	Untouchable caste Cane workers.
Durjodhan's thigh	Durjodhan is the villain of the Mahabharata. Bhima, the second of the five Pandava brothers, is noted for his great physical strength. He subdues Durjodhan by breaking his thigh.
Dust:	To take the dust of a person's feet by bowing to the ground before him is the traditional Indian way of greeting elders and superiors.
Ekka:	A high two-wheeled vehicle drawn by a single horse. Common conveyance in north Bihar.

Forward Block.	A political party.
Gandhi:	The great Indian leader and advocate of Non-violence. Variously referred to as Gandhiji, Mahatma, Mahatmaji.
Gandhiji ki jai	'Victory to Gandhi!' *Mahatmaji ki jai!* 'Victory to the Mahatma!'
Gajon	Songs sung at the Charak festival in April, Sacred to Siva.
Ganesh and Kartik	The two sons of Durga, the elephant god and the god of war. Ganesh, though junior to Kartik, is invoked at the outset of every enterprise and the start of every ceremony. Bestower of prosperity, he is kept in all Hindu shops
Gandhi Seva Sangha	Association of Gandhian workers
Gayatri mantra	Invocation of the sun god. A prayer recited daily by Hindus after they have received their initiation and donned the sacred thread
Ghat	A bathing place on a river or pond a landing place on a river Cremation grounds are often situated near ghats
Ghee	Clarified butter is used universally in India because it does not go rancid in the heat
Gokul pita	A rice cake with coconut filling. Favourite sweet in Bengal
Gouranga	Designation of the medieval saint Chaitanya.
Gram	A lentil
Guru	Preceptor or teacher.
Harataki	A medicinal herb.
Harijan	'Man of God' designation given to all untouchables by Gandhi in his campaign to abolish the stigma of untouchability The observance or practice of untouchability has been made an offence under the law in free India.
Hijal	A kind of tree, Barringtonia Acutangula.
Holi Festival	Spring festival which takes place in March
Homeopathy	A system of medicine popular in India
Individual Satyagraha.	A technique of Satyagraha inaugurated in 1940 according to which chosen workers courted arrest individually one after another in an unbroken succession as a moral protest against war.
Inquilab Zindabad.	'Long Live Revolution' slogan of nationalists.

Jai:	Victory.
Jamadar:	A petty police officer.
Jathaima:	Bengali designation of wife of father's elder brother. A precise terminology defines relationships in India, distinguishing them in a way unknown in the West. People not actually related by blood become so by affection and are as in this case, addressed in a manner befitting their age and status
Ji	Suffix Hindi equivalent of Mr. Added to names. It confers dignity and distinction. Mark of respect.
Jinnah	Muslim leader, later founder of Pakistan. In 1912 he was a prominent member of the Indian National Congress
Jauan	A young stalwart Hindi word
Kasiram Das	Composer of Bengali Mahabharata.
Kisan Sabha	A peasants organisation. Political party.
Kirtan	Liturgical songs depicting the love of the god Krishna for the milkmaid Radha.
Kishunji	Krishna in Bhojpuri dialect.
Krishna	Popular Indian deity thought to be incarnation of Vishnu. Brought up in disguise as a cowherd he later defeats his uncle who has usurped his throne and becomes king. He was born in a prison The story of his love for a milkmaid Radha is the subject of liturgical songs known as *kirtan*
Kali	The mother goddess in her terrible aspect. She presides over devils and ghosts
Khuda or Khoda:	Muslim designation of God
Kavinaj.	A practitioner of the *Aryavedic* system of medicine
Kumar:	Prince
Kolka	Yellow oleander Flowers offered to Siva. All parts of the plants are poisonous
Kayastha:	One of the higher castes in Bihar and Bengal.
Lakshmi.	Goddess of Fortune Worshipped every Thursday at home and annually, in October or November.
Lungi:	Short straight strip of cloth worn around the waist by men.

Lime and lampblack:	To throw into the face. To disgrace, to put to shame.
Latrines:	Cleaning of latrines is the traditional occupation of certain untouchable castes. To force people of other castes to do this work is insulting to highest degree.
Marriage:	Hindu marriages are arranged by the parents.
Mark of marriage:	A short line of vermillion in the parting of the hair above the forehead.
Math:	Monastery or abbey.
Mahout:	Elephant trainer.
Maiji:	Means literally 'Honoured Mother.' A respectful way of addressing an elderly lady.
Masuri:	A lentil used in dhal, much liked in Bengal.
Muktear:	Advocate.
Mahatma:	'Great soul.' Honorary title conferred on Gandhi.
Mahabharata:	One of two great sacred epics of India, the other being the Ramayana.
Motka silk:	A special kind of raw silk worn by priests and devotees while carrying out their holy office.
Marwaris:	People from Marwar, Rajputana. A business community.
Memsaheb:	A white woman or a Westernised woman. Any woman whose ways are strange.
Mahua:	A forest tree of which the fruit is used to make a fragrant wine by aboriginal tribes in Bihar.
Meghnad Bodh:	'The Slaying of Meghnad' an epic poem in Bengali composed by Michael Madhusudan Dutta. Meghnad is a prince of Ceylon and one of the heroes of the Ramayana.
Namaskar or Namaste:	Greeting between equals.
Narayan:	A name of Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity.
Navami Pujah:	The ninth day of the bright fortnight of the autumn moon. The third day of the four day festival of Durga, the great mother goddess.
Nazir:	Head clerk in a court of law.
Naib:	Landowner's manager, estate manager.
Nourkarsahi Nash ho:	'Down with Slavery!' Slogan of Nationalists.
Neem:	A tree the sap and leaves of which are mildly antiseptic. Mimosa.

Patua:	A folk painter.
Pranam:	Salutation to superiors.
Pakur Murder Case:	An infamous case of brother killing brother.
Pujah:	Religious festival or worship of a deity, religious rite.
Parvana:	Religious ceremony.
Parasuram:	A legendary hero or demigod, the first of the three Ramas and sixth incarnation of Vishnu.
Purneswari:	Local goddess, patroness of childbirth and children, protectress of children whose names are inscribed on a brick and tied on to a sacred tree at her shrine.
Pandit or pundit:	Learned Hindu scholar or teacher.
Pomelo:	A large round fruit like a grapefruit.
pice:	Copper coin of lowest value.
Pigtail:	Reference to the lock of hair left on the top of boys' head when their heads are shaven at the initiation ceremony. Worn also by priests. At the initiation ceremony boys receive the sacred thread which is worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm.
Rama:	Legendary sun hero of the Ramayana. Worshipped as divine. Regarded as perfect ruler and perfect man.
Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram patita pavana:	The Ramdhun: Hymn in praise of Rama. Gandhi's favourite.
Raj:	Rule or reign.
Rudraksha:	Berry of a plant sacred to Siva. The rosary of worshippers of Siva is made from rudraksha berries.
Ramdhun:	See *Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram etc.*
Ramayana:	One of the two great epics sacred in India.
Roasted over a husk fire:	A punishment inflicted on wicked women in Bengali fairy tales.
Seva:	Service.
Sevika:	Girl volunteer.
Seva Dal:	Volunteer corps.
Seva Sangh:	Service league.